Spiral

2019

THE POWER ISSUE

within and between us

THE RUBIN

Quiet the mind, activate the spirit with Kate Johnson

Whip smart: Kasia Urbaniak on female empowerment

When magic and warfare met in Buddhism

Jeremy Heimans: New Power to the people

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POWER UP

WHERE DOES TRUE POWER LIE? Your answer likely depends on your definition of power and whether you feel you have it or not. At the Rubin we've come to see power as relational, as a potential within and between us. Throughout 2019, we'll be exploring these themes through a Buddhist lens via exhibitions, public programming, and *Spiral*, our annual magazine.

The exhibition *Faith and Empire* shows how art, politics, and even magic came together over the centuries to shape Tibetan Buddhism and create an unexpected system of power. Though we often associate Buddhism with peaceful, meditative acts, the truth is more complicated. Wars were fought in Buddha's name; secret rituals enacted. Incarnation was used to legitimize power (who would dare challenge a bodhisattva?) and to empower the universal ruler. Even sorcery played an important role, and magical techniques were developed to destroy rival armies and their gods on the battlefield.

Today, we're fighting a different kind of battle. We live in an age where the definition of truth is being questioned. Deep within Buddhism is the notion that speaking truth can bring about transformation. At the Rubin and in these pages we'll look at artists speaking truth to power such as Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam, whose resonant work speaks volumes about the shattered region and its people.

In the Museum we'll explore the power of intention with Ben Rubin and Potion's installation, *The Wheel of Intentions*, which turns the Rubin's iconic spiral staircase into a conceptual exploration of prayer wheels. Enter your intention and spin the wheel to activate your intention and reinforce those of others. You don't have to be at the Museum to participate; virtual visitors will be able to send their intentions online by visiting our website.

Turn the pages of *Spiral* and explore ideas about power through personal essays, original poetry, and illustration. Learn how to get in touch with your power animal (yes, you have one, maybe two) and how game developers get you hooked on power to keep you pushing on to the next level. Peruse our first advice column for ideas on balanced relationships, discover how power changes your brain, and behold power objects through the eyes of contemporary artists Marina Abramović and Sanford Biggers, among others.

Join us at the Rubin this year—as well as online and in these pages—and discover what power means to you.

Jorrit Britschgi
Executive Director
Rubin Museum of Art

Spiral

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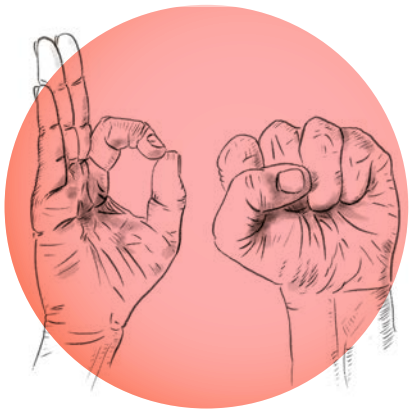

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WAKING UP TO POWER IS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT NORTON

How meditation and activism can work together to quiet the mind in a loud, troubled world

BY *Kate Johnson*

WHAT I HEAR MOST OFTEN in the voices of new meditators is a longing to feel really here for this life, to be 100% awake for it. They have a vague sense of sleepwalking through their days, not really feeling what's happening while it's happening, being mentally consumed with a past they can't change and a future they can't foresee. They express bewilderment in the face of the present moment, having somehow missed the subtle shifts that led up to the current state of affairs. They find themselves blinking in the glare of current reality, wondering, How did I get here? How did we collectively get here? And when "here" is a state of suffering, How do we get to a better place?

This longing—to be present, to be clear, to be fully awake in every moment and empowered to shape the future—is a kind of awakening in itself. We are awake to the fact that we are going through the motions of our life, we are awake to the fact that we don't want to be, and we are aware that waking up is a critical juncture in the path that leads to happiness, wholeness, and freedom.

In contemporary interpretations of the Buddha's teachings, the words awakening, enlightenment, and liberation are often used interchangeably to describe the goal of mindfulness and meditation practices. But more and more, I'm convinced that we have to wake up before we can be free. Awakening is the cause, and liberation is the natural effect of being awake in the world.

Join interactive workshops and conversations in the Compassionate Action series co-curated by Kate Johnson at the Rubin Museum.

The difficult part about waking up is that when we awaken today, we wake up to a world that is full of suffering and inequity. That's not all that there is, but it definitely exists. For those of us who live lives of relative privilege and comfort, being confronted with this reality can be jarring. It can make us want to close our eyes and turn away.

This was exactly my path. I thought I was coming to meditation because politics hurt too much. Local, national, and global governments and their shady dealings in business and civil society seemed overwhelming in their disfunction. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism—ALL of the -isms and the -obias that showed up on the world stage also showed up in my work relationships, friendships, and romantic partnerships.

I thought I needed a refuge from the troubles of the world. What I got was a refuge where I could process the troubles of the world, a place where I could cultivate enough well-being to reengage with it. Sitting in the quiet of the meditation hall, my mind got much, much louder before it ever got quiet.

Dynamics of internalized privilege and oppression often masquerade as experiences we think of as intensely personal and unrelated to politics. A sense of separation. Restlessness, doubt, and fear. Craving for comfort. Irritation when what little comfort we have is disturbed. But the longer we stay with what feels like our personal experience, the more we can see that these experiences are microcosmic manifestations of the greed, hatred, and delusion that underscore what Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called the "three giant triplets" of "capitalism, materialism, and racism."

Many Buddhist teachers and scholars describe disillusionment, and even disgust, as a stage of insight on the path to liberation. They often identify it as the outcome of awakening into the truth of impermanence, the soul-level realization that every conditioned phenomenon in this world, including our own bodies, are subject to death and decay. A natural response to this realization is to become disenchanted with the stuff of this world.

In my own practice and teaching, I've seen disillusionment occur as a stage of insight into the dynamics of privilege and oppression. If our mindfulness practice includes attention to the suffering of the world and an investigation of its causes, that exploration will inevitably lead us to question the systems that result in those conditions and the mental models that power them. If our mindfulness practice includes a patient awareness of our own thoughts, emotions, and body sensations that arise in relation to people we perceive as different from us, they will inevitably lead us face to face with the degree to which we have internalized those same systems. These awakenings are not just a side effect of spiritual practice—they are the very point of spiritual practice. For some of us, they are the way in to a liberating awareness of the truth of our interdependence and recognition that happiness and freedom are inherently collective endeavors.

We have to wake up before we can be liberated from the dynamics of privilege and oppression that live inside of us and before we can liberate ourselves from participating in the systems that perpetuate privilege and oppression in our world. The good news is that once we do the hard work of waking up—of noticing what is happening inside and around us moment by moment, of knowing our relationship to it, and of using our power to change—liberation is kind of inevitable.

In the process of waking up to the truth of institutionalized power, we may fear that our hearts will break, and we will be right. They will break open, and we will be radically transformed. We will find that we have access to a power much greater than the power that systemic privilege affords us. It is a power that can drive us toward profound change.

Kate Johnson teaches mindful yoga in public schools and Buddhist meditation at the Interdependence Project and facilitates an embodied approach to organizational and leadership development for social change agents and communities. Johnson holds a BFA in dance from the Alvin Ailey School/Fordham University and a MA in performance studies from New York University. Her book *Friendship as Freedom: Mindful Practices for Resisting Oppression and Building Community* will be published by Parallax Press in 2019.

ALIEN-NATION

AND THE VOICE OF SHAHIDUL ALAM

The Bangladeshi photographer and activist risks his freedom for protest

BY *Rahaab Allana*

Azad attended political rallies with her sister when she was a child. As a singer and performer, she was involved with the women's movement, the committee demanding the trial of war criminals, and the cultural group Charon Shangshkritik Kenro, which led to her joining Shommilito Shangshkritik Jote. As part of this group, she was active in the movement to bring down President Ershad. Here, Azad is pictured protesting at a rally at Shahid Minar. Shahidul Alam (b. 1955, Dhaka, Bangladesh); *Smriti Azad*, *Dhaka*; 1994; photograph; courtesy of Drik.

IN ANCIENT FOLKLORE, an alien was a being from another place, unfamiliar with the customs of the inhabitants it encountered. An engagement with the otherworldly triggered the imagination of writers, thinkers, and statesmen to conceive of and possibly even prepare for what was beyond their borders. Ironically, the times now are not very different, as people and governments have turned against their neighbors. The story here is graver still—a situation wherein they turn against their own people.

In statecraft, one always questions the very nature of authority, but also its location. Who wields power? Is it the vigilant citizen, regimes, activists from the field? Are the voices of those who have been disenfranchised or those who strategically deploy their power able to cultivate change for the better?

Resounding across the globe, after being released on bail in late 2018 following a 107-day incarceration in Bangladesh, one voice certainly stands out from the fray: the deep, meditative inflection of Shahidul Alam. He once stated, "There is no government I know that does not champion democracy and human rights in its rhetoric but also actively suppress both in its practice. It's best to recognize that reality and work within it rather than fantasize some ideal solution that has no relevance to everyday art practice."

For Shahidul and other activists, the everyday is perhaps the *place* of power, and as we have learned, everyone who now has the means of communicating across the planet through mobile devices should ideally be the *voice* of real power: plural, shared, and dispersed.

As images flicker across the multiscreens of our everyday lives, and as data sharing and mining become possibly the most empowering tools of our democracy, do we realize how and when we become affiliated to a political will, as well as when power is wrested from us?

Shahidul Alam, renowned photographer, pedagogue, writer, and curator, has countered rote opinions, opposed covert and guided elisions of secular expression, and revealed marginalizations and atrocities within his community. On August 5, 2018, he was arrested and imprisoned for voicing his reactions to civil injustices being protested by students who mobilized in the thousands across Bangladesh some months prior.

His wrongful incarceration and conditional release bring to light constitutional loopholes those in power use to mobilize laws such as Section 57 of Bangladesh's Information Communications Technology Act, under which several citizens and media practitioners have been incarcerated and tortured for expressing their so-called antinational opinions. They have been deemed trespassers and troublemakers.

After founding both the Drik Picture Library and the Pathshala South Asian Media Institute in 1998, Shahidul established Chobi Mela, South Asia's most influential photography festival, as well as Banglarights, an independent media platform for human rights in Bangladesh. Which is to say, there is a

See Shahidul Alam's work in the exhibition Shahidul Alam: Truth to Power at the Rubin Museum.

dynamic, poetic, and prophetic power in this moment, as Shahidul, as one of the masters of image-making in the world, has over the years galvanized the passionate articulations of an entire generation to think critically; to see well beyond the surface of an image or circumstance; and to always question every event, intention, context, and voice of the self and other. Having probed and exposed homogenizing tendencies across social spectrums by cross-examining cultures in conflict, he has championed the individual as an unwavering, energized force and personal disclosure as a profound political tool.

His pictures, like many of those now coming from the street, present an image of a world that seems to be turning against itself and hence others too. As a consequence, nothing becomes more elusive than our association to place, and hence, nothing more contentious than the laws that seek to govern our actions therein. As controllers of our own image, are we slowly defined by them, covertly or by the viewers who follow us? Can we ponder what the collective will of the afterlife of an image will be? At a time when fabricating situations and reframing memories through staged images proliferate, the risks and ethical implications of circulating images makes us also revisit the claims of news-gathering processes. Who is to be trusted? Shahidul suggests that everyone can and must act ethically to set the barometer right.

As political pogroms surrounding identity issues force the world into binaries yet again—as religion, caste, or class in coded and overt ways enforce xenophobic insecurities or induce a depraved form of ritual cleansing—Shahidul's life clearly denounces a growing societal malaise by speaking to and of vibrant lived testimonies that function as counterarguments, making transparent rampant authoritative motives. His work activates a sense of multiculturalism that is carefully and poignantly deployed as a parallel dimension through mounted international exhibitions like *Women of the Naxalite Movement* and *Everyday Life in Bangladesh* and publications such as *People's War*, *Birth Pangs of the Nation*, *and My Journey as a Witness*. He tackles transnational issues with a symbolic energy through head-on debates with notions of sovereignty, authenticity, and even civilization.

In 2017, Shahidul presented the exhibition *Embracing the Other*, looking at ways we can recalibrate the debate on radical Islam by considering the everyday life of devotees. It focused on one particular center of learning, the Bait Ur Rouf Mosque. In his words, "What I want to do through this work is to establish that Islam (and pretty much all religions) by and large, provides a moral compass for our navigation. There are large magnets around that have changed the direction of our compass. I want to return to the original direction and to remind people that it is the carriers of these magnets, both within and outside, whom we need to challenge. It is not Islam we need to fear, but the weapons industry and those who control it."

Questioning stereotypes by exposing local histories and personal narratives has been a constant, provocative refrain in his work, enabling him to examine tolerance in contemporary South Asia. His photography and poetry present interlinked propositions for the need for fusions at a societal level by using visual reminders and metaphors around appropriation and occupation. It is this very ethics of discontentment—ideological affinities and strategies resulting from constitutional stalemates—that he emphatically deploys for bearing witness at home, even his own home from which authorities forcefully and secretly captured him.

The situation at hand also brings into focus an exhibition he produced in 1987, *A Struggle for Democracy*, which spoke of the pangs of a nation on the precipice of change, including the death of activist Noor Hossain that led to free elections in 1991. Yet the terror, genocide, civil unrest, and devastation and uprooting of entire communities continues to unfold. While many stories of suffering are simply never told, Shahidul's work preempts a new wave around the iconography of activism, with the production of new visual testimonials and fearless inscriptions of injustices, as his own students are now everywhere, and his institutions stand strong. Our thoughts remain with Shahidul who has shown us, once again through his own predicament, the agonized erasures and absences that are being imprinted on the collective memory of people everywhere.

Through his thesaurus of clues we find evidence of other lives that now capture our undivided attention, such as Kalpana, who was only twenty-three when she was abducted after making her life's mission to campaign for the rights of the indigenous people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In 2016, Shahidul mounted an exhibition about her using laser etching on straw mats. These etchings are not only meant to be reflected in images but also in the memories of all nations that need to embrace and not alienate themselves and their others.

As he is honored for his work in Kathmandu, Nepal, and Ahmedabad, India, in the months since his imprisonment, what needs to be demanded is for him to be cleared of wrongdoing and his safe return to the throng—the ebb and flow of the streets—the location of power from which he reports, inspires, and will always be remembered.

As bullets whiz by, as shrapnel shard, as hate pours from above
As blue skies curse, the wounded I nurse, as spite replaces love
It is home I long, as I boundaries cross, a shelter that I seek
A world for us all, white brown short tall, the boisterous and the meek
—Shahidul Alam, excerpt from "Place" (2017)

On November 10, 1987, the opposition parties in Bangladesh tried to stage a siege of Dhaka in an attempt to oust President Ershad. Noor Hossain was a young worker who came out in the streets to join the protest. He had painted "Let democracy be freed" on his back, and police shot him. The mural on the walls of Jahangirnagar University on the outskirts of Dhaka is dedicated to him. Shahidul Alam (b. 1955, Dhaka, Bangladesh); *Noor Hossain, Dhaka*; 1990; photograph; courtesy of Drik.

Rahaab Allana is curator/publisher of the Alkazi Foundation for the Arts in New Delhi, a fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society in London, and an honorary research fellow at the University College, London. After completing his master's degree from SOAS in London, he was a curator at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. He has curated, edited, and contributed to many national and international exhibitions and publications.

POEM

Breath for Guan Yin

by Ching-In Chen

1. **10,000 steps a hum**
sturdy red support yellow tile cascade

one metal figure waiting water to quiet mind's battle

metallic rain horde means fill your bathtub cook all food no water in grocery store gas station line to empty leftover white cardboard boxes crush floorlength we unpack lift higher
no bathing showering do we have an axe? a tight set of drawers in lungs

slow a breath for ritual smoke
open late door and friend a shoe on busy rack

enter already-breathing room one hundred golden figures sitting in perch
each sewn seat in neat

considering attic a man walks in front of watching window no shoes we could second

each foot slowly again again

floor it a message says to knock on airbnb door

2. ***man or woman? man or woman? no other options at check-in ladies or jocks? no time for questions 11 size sneakers pair of grey shorts woman's blouse children's shoes what size? line of eagers at distribution line all-day Rice University students writing orders***

fill big blue bags sort assembly walkers toothbrushes pillows blankets hot commodity special line form right

'don't you Mister me!' I see who want ladies' shoes repeating request 'I'm not a Mister! I'm not a Mister!' no response before turning away from line toward line of beds

volunteer supervisor no time

I write post-it please no assumptions note please respect questions please no time

3. **friend said 'all the aunties chanting' brought me green**

one sound four meanings I enter inflection meaning mother not horse

meaning guide sits sings lesson from diverging mouth

chemical cloud pings a hot, rushing air **all bodies in yard humming in mind**

thick infection in head

can't say I broke much trying not to ingest 10,000 hurricane microbes let go spider tendrils

4. ***at lost and found eyeglasses a credit card note left at desk because no cell phone woman in wheelchair checks in again no cell phone cold box pizza***

white-haired unshaven's waded waters wants help calling FEMA Louisiana to Katrina lost bags maybe at last shelter lost daugher son back in LA we roll through shelter names and phone number inhale smoke dial disembodied numbers to receive

heart knows
attach sister in empty seat
cling worthy ache bring down rain

why chant dead grandmothers into room ***animal set loose in chest*** **only one a believer other a cook preparing food hungry repentants**

5. ***when street drains pressure in street***

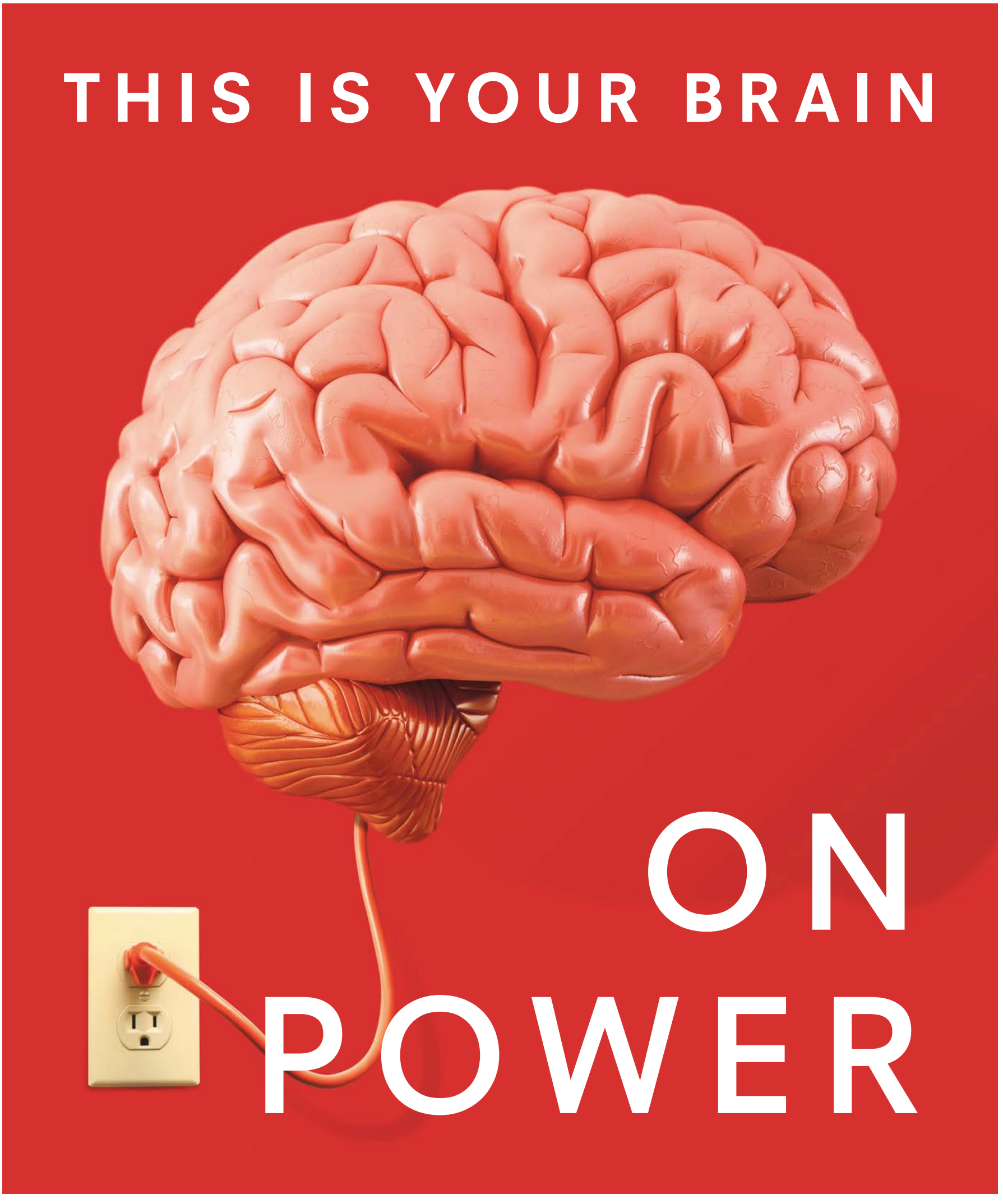
all notes escaping injure try not
exhume breath from body

walk away dead night throw arms to air

hoping for birds to land

Ching-In Chen is the author of *The Heart's Traffic* and *recombinant*, which won the 2018 Lambda Literary Award for Transgender Poetry. Chen is also the co-editor of *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence within Activist Communities* and *Here Is a Pen: An Anthology of West Coast Kundiman Poets*. A poetry editor for the *Texas Review*, they currently teach creative writing at Sam Houston State University and attend Jade Buddha Temple in Houston. www.chinginchen.com

THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON POWER



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DELCAN & COMPANY

According to neuroscientist Sukhvinder Obhi, power is neither good nor bad—it's all in the way you use it

BY *Howard Kaplan*

Howard Kaplan: How did you begin to study power and its effects on the brain?
Professor Sukhvinder Obhi: One of the things we studied for quite a few years is the phenomena of non-conscious mimicry, the tendency to copy what other people are doing in a social interaction. It led us to the mirror system and a process called mirroring, which involves the activation of structures in the brain of someone who is observing another person's actions. It's called mirroring because the activated structures overlap with the motor structures that would be active if the observer was performing the action themselves. We were researching the potential link between this kind of mirroring and the behavioral manifestation of non-conscious mimicry. In essence, we were wondering if non-conscious mimicry might be implemented by mirroring in the brain, as both phenomena involve taking an input from another person and then activating motor structures. Strangely, this line of research inquiry led us to power.

How does the mirror system relate to power and the brain?
As we were doing our research, we looked at the kinds of variables that are known to affect non-conscious mimicry and saw whether those same variables affected mirroring in the brain. For example, social psychologists have found that when you feel independent you mimic other people less. When you feel socially connected you mimic other people more. We wondered whether making someone feel interdependent would be associated with more of this motor activity in the brain—that is, mirroring—when they are watching somebody else. If they're feeling independent, we should see less of it. That's exactly what we found. That then became an approach that we started using to explore the idea that the mirror system might underlie social mimicry.

This is where we get to power. Social psychologists had also looked at the effects of power on mimicry, and they found that when you get two people interacting who differ in the level of power that they hold, the pattern of mimicry is quite interesting. When I'm feeling powerful I don't mimic someone who is less powerful very much. But when I'm feeling powerless I mimic a powerful person quite a bit. There's asymmetry in the degree of mimicry that people show when they are in a power-laden dynamic. We decided to do the obvious experiment of assessing mirroring in the brain of people feeling powerful or powerless.

How did you do this?
We use a neuroscientific technique called Transcranial Magnetic Simulation (TMS) to get a momentary readout on the excitability levels of the motor cortex in the human brain. We gathered a group and primed some of our participants to feel really powerful using a standard technique that involves them thinking about a time when they had control over other people.

We asked a second group to think about a time when they felt powerless. We had another group as a control condition where they just wrote down what they did yesterday.

We measured mirroring response in the motor cortex using this TMS technique while they watched a fairly benign action, for instance squeezing a rubber ball. Remarkably, we found that the powerful people weren't really mirroring. The motor cortical activity in the power holders was low. Whereas with the powerless people, their motor cortex was quite active. It was consistent with what the social psychologists had found in behavior. That helped us understand further how social mimicry might unfold.

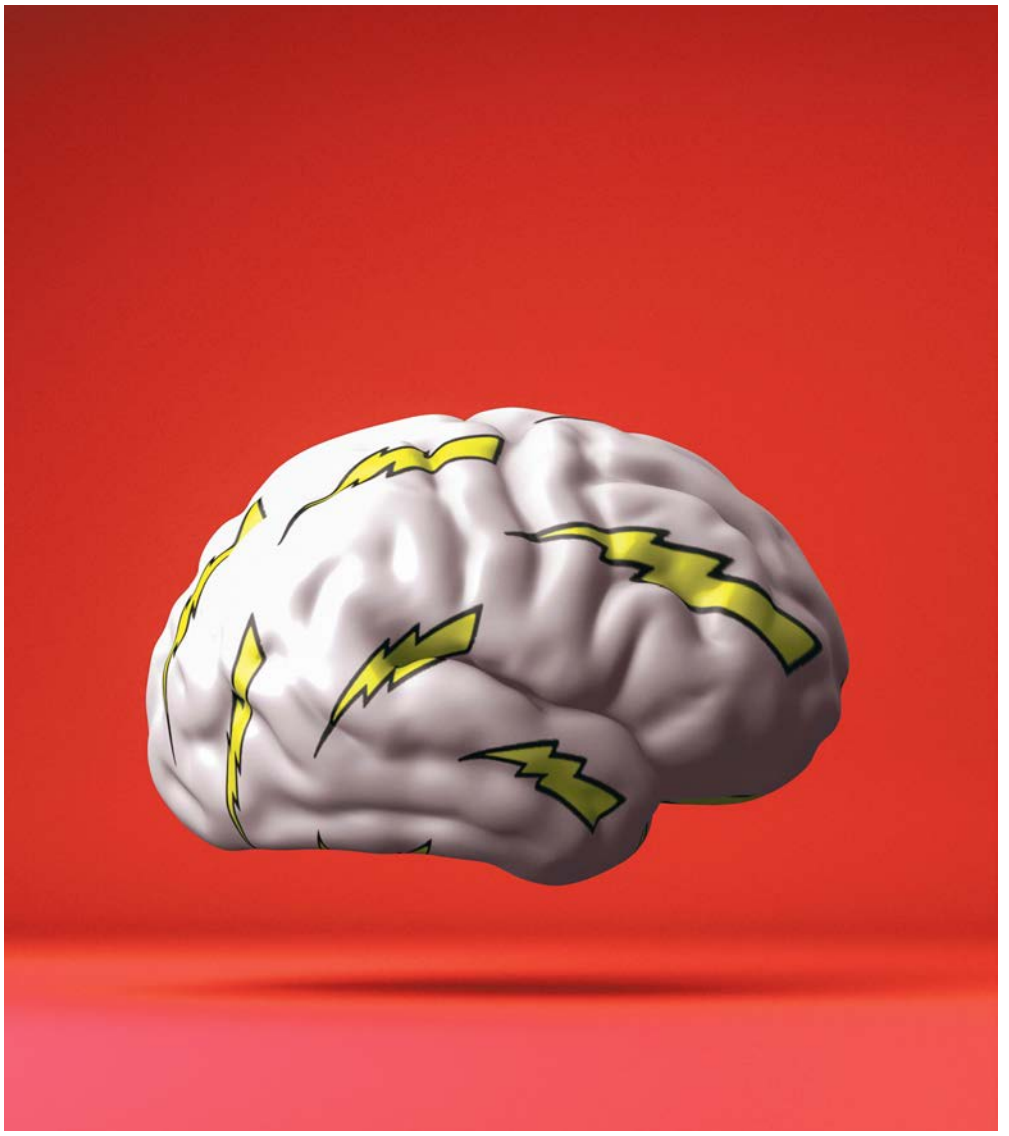
How did it influence your ideas about power?
We became very interested in the idea that power is this ubiquitous social force. If you want to understand social behavior, you can't really understand it without thinking about power, because power permeates virtually all interactions in the social world. I often use a Bertrand Russell quote: "The fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics." Russell's perspective is insightful.

What do we know about the brains of people that feel powerful versus powerless?
From a cognitive neuroscience perspective, power has been understudied, but it's very likely that power affects multiple brain systems. In terms of what we've studied, there are a couple of interesting brain systems that we think are linked to different power states. One of these systems is called the behavioral activation system. It is about our propensity to get up and do something, to act. The other is the behavioral inhibition system. It is involved in inhibiting behavior and avoidance of threat.

In our research we've found that feeling powerless is associated with less activity in the behavioral activation system, which reflects lower approach orientation. Conversely, powerful people show more of this left frontal brain activity. In fact, neutral people show quite a bit of this left frontal activity as well. The difference seems to come from the low-power people. When you are feeling particularly low power, your brain seems to change in a way where you're engaging the behavioral activation system less. This pattern of brain activity could explain why low-power people might display more tentativeness and be less prone to just getting up and acting in a situation. Of course, this affects how people might access opportunities in the world.

Is one locked in for life to who they are? Say a person has fallen from power and has become humbled. Do they still retain the biology of power?
Power is a complex thing. Power can be related to your position in a hierarchy. The higher up you are, the more power you have. But that view of power can give you the impression that power can be a bit rigid. Actually, power is very dynamic. If you look at the workplace and think about a person who is a middle manager, they live half their lives looking up and the other half looking down. Their relative power in any given situation could be high or low. They can be in a meeting with their boss where they are the least powerful person, and then walk into another room where they have their team and now they are the most powerful person.

On a timescale of potentially just minutes your relative power can go up or down. So power is dynamic, and what the research would suggest is that yes, priming somebody to feel more or less powerful can reconfigure the way the brain is processing the social world. That said, there are personality traits, for example narcissism, that are sometimes present in powerful individuals, and these may be more enduring.



Power is just your ability to influence the states of other people. The good or bad outcomes yield from how you use it.

Why do you think it's important to study the relationship between power and the brain?
We haven't got a chance of understanding social behavior unless we can understand what power is doing, and to do this we have to understand what's going on in the brain. We know to some extent how the brain processes the social world, so knowing how these brain processes change when somebody is in a state of high or low power is critical to us understanding at a deeper level the forces that shape social interactions.

Once you have a sense of what's happening in the brain, it gives you a much more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. That can then lead to the development of strategies or ways to advise people in a more enlightened way. You can advise people on how they can potentially harness the positive effects of power and mitigate some of the negatives. Such advice is bolstered by an understanding not just of behavior but of the brain processes that underlie the behavior.

Read an extended interview with Professor Obhi at RubinMuseum.org/Spiral.

Power seems to be associated with a lot of what we perceive as negative outcomes, but what are some of the positive ones? How can we harness these positive outcomes?
I consider power to be not good or bad. Power is just your ability to influence the states of other people. The good or bad outcomes yield from how you use it. A lot of the research on power looks at what I call the default effects of power. You make someone feel powerful and then you look at what it does to their behavior. If you look at the social psychology of this, you see when someone feels powerful they become worse at taking the perspective of other people. When I'm not taking your perspective, it means I'm not taking you into account, which means I'm more likely to act in a way that damages you. We also see that powerful people are more likely to engage in any kind of action in any situation, regardless if the action is appropriate or not. That means you're more impulsive.

All of these are default effects of power. On average when you test a group of people, these effects just happen when you make them feel powerful. I would guess that many of the negative effects of what I call everyday power—the kinds of dynamics that play out in the workplace or family life—are happening because we are not aware of how power is affecting the way we're doing things. We're not aware that the power that we feel is making us worse at perspective-taking and perhaps less empathic. We're not aware of the fact that power might be making us more impulsive.

The first step is to create an awareness of what power can do and then coach people in using power more mindfully. Power is not good or bad—it's how you use it. Once you know that the default effects of power can produce negative tendencies, then it puts you in the driver's seat to mindfully avoid them.

How can your research be applied to our day-to-day lives?
It's very much about awareness. The research that we're doing and that others are doing is showing what power can do to the brain and behavior, and the first step is just to appreciate that. Sit back and say, "Wow, I didn't know that if I feel powerful I'm more likely to interrupt people." Something like that may seem like it's pretty benign; it's a small thing. But if you think about powerful people interrupting people day in day out all the time, and then you think about the cumulative effects on those other people you can see how that can create negative social interactions.

The first question to ask would be: How are you using the influence you have over others? If you understand what power is doing to you, you are understanding yourself and can potentially mitigate some of the negatives and harness some of the positives. One of the positives is that power makes you more goal-directed and more likely to act. Take advantage of that and focus on goals that are conducive to positive incomes. My thesis is that a powerful person will be more effective when they are engaged in behavior that has positive outcomes for other people.

Professor Sukhvinder Obhi is the director and principal investigator of the Social Brain Body and Action Lab at McMaster University, Canada. He completed his PhD in cognitive neuroscience at University College London. Professor Obhi is internationally known for his research on power and the brain and has published over 75 articles and authored multiple books. He is actively engaged in knowledge mobilization outside of the academy, and to that end, he consults with a range of organizations on the topics of power and leadership in a complex social world.

Howard Kaplan is an editor and writer who helped found *Spiral* magazine in 2015. He currently works at the Smithsonian and divides his time between Washington, DC, and New York City.

POWER OBJECTS

Contemporary artists share their personal talismans both made and found

E.V. Day

I hold the doll in one
hand and wind a cord
around and around the
doll with the other.
The trick is to maintain
the right amount of
tension
to keep the cord from
slipping off.
It is a bit of a game.
It always takes me multi-
ple tries to get it right.
To completely cover her
body with string
takes concentration and
coordination.
It is impossible to
multi-task.
While I am doing this
I lose sense of time and
gravity disappears.
To "mummify" Barbie in
this way
is meditation.

E.V. Day; *Mummified Barbie*; 2018; beeswax, twine, and Barbie doll; 4 x 12 in.; image courtesy of E.V. Day

Lisa Ross

It sails me to the river's edge when I need to understand the universe / takes me past buildings blocking sight and opens vistas that no one can own / Incalculable views of Jersey, Brooklyn, Queens and Lady Liberty whispers, "You're a millionaire" / power comes through my feet as I pedal meeting the rising sun / no one is out by the water and I hear—"this morning is yours" / This black metal frame changes moods /shuts down depression / compels creative thinking as I whirl over bridges collecting city lights of the night / These wheels whiz me through neighborhoods smelling foods, seeing people from lands innumerable / Lebanon, Italy, Ethiopia, China, Mexico, Ireland, Russia, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Greece, and on / Heading home it gets me through Hell's Gate unscathed up into the Bronx where time settles, suns set, and we brake to recharge.

My Bicycle; image courtesy of Lisa Ross

Kembra Pfahler

Only one object has been consistent in my life: the bowling ball I found walking home from school one afternoon in 1980 in New York City. Do I imbue my ball with power? Is it an object that I hold sacred? I'd have to say yes. So much so that at one point the ball felt alive, and I wanted to get a mate or a sibling for it. I walked into a bowling alley on 14th Street and walked out with one. I did many art projects with these bowling balls. My favorite was tying them to my feet and walking on them. They represented and reminded me of the black ball flags signaling dangerous waters on the Southern California beaches where I grew up. Standing on the balls was like surfing. One friend crocheted a doll of me in my The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black costume with bowling balls taped to my feet. Hans Baldung painted women being tortured by having balls strapped to their feet. I found these paintings later and it affirmed my obsession even more. This black sphere sent me through a liminal phase of powerful thoughts and actions. It formed the philosophies that I put into practice. The black ball was the trigger that set my life upon a certain course, and as much as I'd like to think this black ball is not so special, it is.

Crocheted doll by Croshame; image courtesy of Kembra Pfahler

Ben Venom

I acquired this machete in Bangkok, Thailand, many years ago and placed it on the mantle in my art studio immediately upon my return to San Francisco. Soon after, my good friend Bill McRight filled the blade with engraved drawings and text. These markings all relate to the imagery I work with in my textile pieces and helped transform the machete from a simple weapon to a personal relic. Over time, it has never lost its place on the mantle amid the clutter in my studio. Though the blade itself can be seen as intimidating or powerful, I find that its engraved surface wards off any invaders, real or imagined.

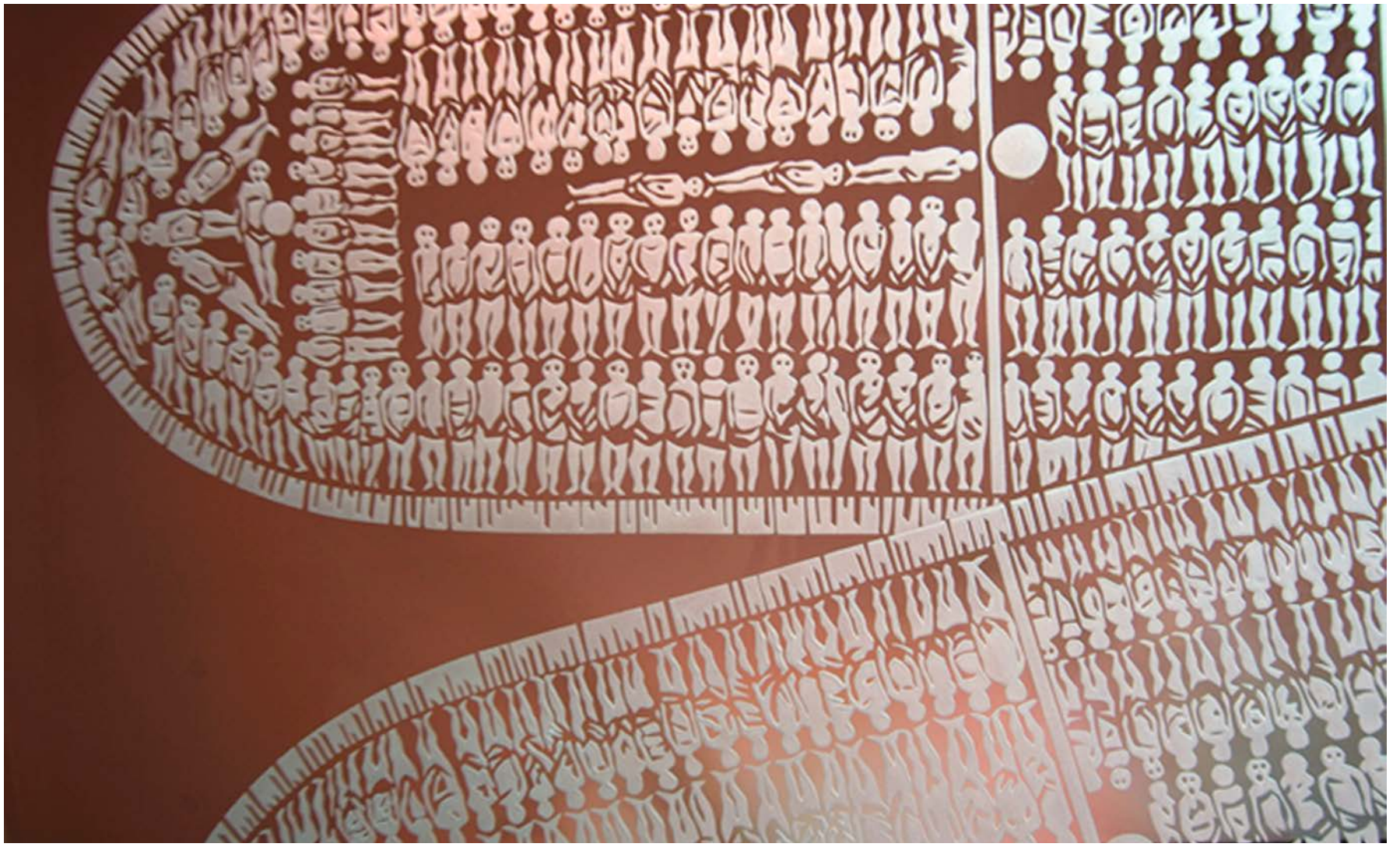
Machete; image courtesy of Ben Venom

Sanford Biggers

The lotus rises
magical and majestic
from muck and mire

its reflection at
once talisman and portal
through middle passage

Sanford Biggers; *Lotus* (detail); 2007; steel, etched glass, colored LEDs; diam. 7 ft.; installation view at the Rubin Museum of Art, *Grains of Emptiness: Buddhism Inspired Contemporary Art* (2010—11); image courtesy of the artist



Jack Waters

My power object is the Santeria bust our neighbor Maria gave to me and my partner, Peter, in the mid-1980s. She said if we ever decided we didn't want it to not give or throw it away but to give it back to her. Maria was the neighborhood orisha. She lived on the second floor of our five-story tenement walk-up on the Lower East Side. When people wanted a spell, dream interpretation, or prediction, they'd call from the street up to her window on the second floor. Maria rarely left her apartment except to go to church on Sunday. I guess she had a special orisha name, because there was rarely a day you didn't hear someone calling "Pooka!" I never asked her about this name; I just assumed it was an orisha name, because anyone who didn't want her magical services just called her Maria. We never asked but she always said an incantation whenever we had a court date with our evil landlord, Walter. Maria was afraid to cross him legally for fear of eviction and the immigration authorities—he kept her under constant threat. But boy could Maria cast a spell. In thirty years of housing court litigation we never lost a case. Maria passed away some years ago. The bust is still sitting on the sconce in our kitchen.

Santeria bust; image courtesy of Jack Waters

Marina Abramović

I poured blood over the Power Objects to stage a certain emotion, to make a power center.

Natural Perforated Stone, New Caledonia

The owner of the stone chews a certain plant and spits into the largest hole. He then has a meal of boiled yam and goes to fight and kill an enemy. He collects a portion of food chewed by the enemy (for example, chewed sugar cane, banana skin, etc.) and dips this repeatedly in the largest hole until blood appears from the smallest hole, which is the sign that the victim is dead.

Text excerpts from Marina Abramović, Public Body *(Charta: Milan, 2001).*

Marina Abramović; *Power Objects* from the work *Spirit Cooking with Power Objects*; 1998; beeswax, bandages, pig blood; Moderna Gallerija, Ljubljana, Slovenia; © Marina Abramović; courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

Marina Abramović has pioneered performance art, creating some of the form's most important early works. The body has always been both her subject and medium. Abramović was awarded the Golden Lion for Best Artist at the 1997 Venice Biennale. In 2008 she was decorated with the Austrian Commander Cross for her contribution to art history. Abramović founded Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), a platform for immaterial and long durational work to create new possibilities for collaboration among thinkers of all fields.

Sanford Biggers was raised in Los Angeles and currently lives and works in New York City. He was awarded the 2017 Rome Prize in Visual Arts. He has had solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, and Brooklyn Museum, among others. His work is an interplay of narrative, perspective, and history that speaks to current social, political, and economic happenings while also examining the contexts that bore them.

E.V. Day is a New York–based artist whose work explores themes of sexuality and humor while employing gravity-defying suspension techniques. Day was recently awarded the prestigious Rome Prize for Visual Arts by the American Academy in Rome, and she has had many solo exhibitions, including at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria and the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University. Day received her MFA in sculpture from Yale University School of Art.

Kembra Pfahler is an artist and rock musician who moved from Los Angeles to New York City in 1979. She spent the 1980s making performances and Super 8 films and devoted herself to availabism, antinaturalism, and gothletics, the philosophies she still practices today. In 1990 Pfahler and Samoa Moriki formed The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black, a theatrical death rock band. In the early aughts, Pfahler started exhibiting in the art world and performed internationally with the women in her band, the Girls of Karen Black.

Lisa Ross is an artist and photographer who lives and works in the Bronx. Her work revolves around the liminal spaces in which faith, culture, and abstraction meet, and she describes her work as a portrait of a landscape and a landscape of a portrait. Her first museum exhibition, *Living Shrines of Uyghur China*, took place at the Rubin Museum of Art in 2013 and was accompanied by a book of the same name. Ross is a grantee of the Asian Cultural Council and a Bronx Museum AIM recipient.

Ben Venom is a textile artist based in San Francisco. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at the Levi Strauss Museum, the National Folk Museum of Korea, HPGRP Gallery, Taubman Museum, Charlotte Fogh Gallery, and the Gregg Museum. Venom has been interviewed by NPR, Playboy, Juxtapoz, KQED, Maxim, and CBS Sunday Morning. Recently, he was the artist in residence at the de Young Museum and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

Jack Waters most recently appeared with the band NYOBS in *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline* at the Whitney Museum. Known for his experimental, cross-disciplinary multimedia works, Waters has exhibited internationally at the New Museum, London Film Makers Cooperative, Center for Contemporary Culture Barcelona (CCCB), and Anthology Film Archives. With his partner, Peter Cramer, Jack co-directed ABC No Rio while founding the nonprofit arts umbrella Allied Productions, Inc. and the community art garden Le Petit Versailles.

EMPOWERMENTS: AWAKENING THE BUDDHA WITHIN

Ritual ceremonies guide us on the path to enlightenment

BY *Scott Globus*

IN TIBETAN VAJRAYANA BUDDHISM the process of awakening begins when we receive an empowerment from a qualified meditation master. The empowerment ceremony is a grand ritual to introduce us to our own innermost Buddha qualities, which the most sophisticated philosophical tenets of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism call Buddha Nature. Within our individual, wild, untamed mind exists the inherent potential to awaken as a buddha, liberated from our sufferings and fully capable of helping all beings pacify their own sufferings and develop the great qualities of love, compassion, patience, equanimity, and omniscient wisdom that we all have deep within. Buddha accomplished this awakening over 2,500 years ago under the Bodhi Tree, and his methods have been passed down from teacher to disciple in an unbroken lineage until the present. Great spiritual teachers still live among us, and we can connect with them.

To start this process, we should seek out a lama, a spiritual teacher, who holds the unbroken lineage and has manifested the signs and qualities of deep spiritual realization. The lama should be firmly devoted to assisting disciples, not merely using them for self-centered, short-term goals. We have to do some research and look closely. The traditional texts always tell us to choose a teacher carefully—likewise, the teacher has to investigate the qualities of the student. Once we feel we can trust a lama, we can receive an empowerment.

During the empowerment ceremony, we take the vows of refuge and *bodhicitta*. When we "take refuge," we vow to put our faith and trust in the lama, the Buddha, the teachings of the Buddha known as the Dharma, and the community of Buddhist practitioners called the sangha, and we pledge to practice meditation and live in accord with Buddhist principles. When we take the *bodhicitta* vow, we promise not to harm other living beings, and we vow to become enlightened so that we can swiftly help all beings become free of suffering and also attain enlightenment.

In an empowerment ritual, as the lama introduces us to our pure Buddha qualities, we promise to see the world and living beings as sacred. Due to our self-clinging and deeply entrenched habits, seeing the world and all beings in this way is hard to do, so we promise to embark on the path of meditation, which the empowerment from the lama has authorized us to practice. Even when times are tough, we remember that we have a sacred commitment, called *samaya*, with the teacher, so we must not give up. In this way, the lama has empowered us with a skillful meditation method to combat our usual tendency for indolence, ignorance, and selfishness. Furthermore, through continued and consistent meditation practice, our experience of suffering will diminish and positive qualities will manifest.

The lamas tell us that there will come a time when, due to our effort in meditation, our sacred outlook will become stable and uncontrived. We will effortlessly see the world as a pure land and all beings as perfect buddhas, and our mind will be filled with love and compassion for all. At that moment the empowerment we initially received from the external lama will have come to fruition, and our inner power will expand, making us self-empowered and capable of providing refuge and inspiration to others. It is possible for this awakening to happen very quickly, but for most of us it takes diligent effort applied over a long time, combined with continued guidance from our spiritual teachers.

Having had the good fortune to receive hundreds of empowerments from scores of authentic lamas, I feel confident that if one sincerely follows this path, it will yield a meaningful use of one's precious human life. There are many proven meditation methods that can completely unravel and pacify our neurotic minds and fill us with love and compassion for all. This possibility should give us a sense of hope.

Three Heads and Six Arms from a Set of Initiation Cards (Tsakali) Tibet; ca. 14th century; pigments on paper; Rubin Museum of Art; Gift of Dr. David Nalin; C2011.7.1.4

Scott Globus grew up in New Jersey and settled in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid-1980s after graduating from MIT. He began practicing Tibetan Buddhist meditation under the guidance of Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche at Orgyen Dorje Den in 1990. Scott has been fortunate to receive teachings and empowerments from many accomplished meditation masters. He served as president of Orgyen Dorje Den for over twenty years and in 2018 started offering introductory meditation classes.

ADVICE FROM A MINDFULNESS TEACHER

BY *Ayman Mukerji Household*

My preschooler son is amazing until he decides to be defiant. He'll put his foot down and simply not listen to what we ask him to do. This happens at least once a day. The other day at the playground we gave him a five-minute reminder that we would be leaving, and he seemed okay, but when the time came he threw an epic tantrum. Our morning routine is the worst of all. When we are finally out the door (after a LOT of coaxing!), he starts crying, stands still, and does anything he can to delay leaving. We have tried many things—bribing him, carrying him, trying to reason with him—but to no avail. Is there something wrong with my child? Please help!

Sounds like you have pulled out all the stops to deal with your son's strong will. I understand that you may be feeling helpless, but you can take heart that your child's behavior pattern is most likely a healthy developmental milestone. His motor skills are improving rapidly, enabling him to explore his surroundings independently. He is also developing a sense of self, trying to define who he is and what he can do. So you find him exerting himself, pushing and experimenting with boundaries, which stems from his evolutionary need to learn life skills and establish autonomy. But a lot of his inexperienced adventures might be dangerous—like playing with a kitchen knife—or simply unacceptible, such as a whim to decorate your family photo with ketchup. It isn't surprising that his misadventures are therefore frequently met with the word no, leaving him confused and disappointed. Now you are the lucky one with the responsibility to encourage his independence while teaching him limits. Sounds like a tall order! Let me share a step-by-step guide on how to manage these situations.

Read another advice letter and "Ten Tips for Diffusing Power Struggles" at RubinMuseum.org/Spiral.

1 Check Safety

Use your keen parent instincts to assess if your child is putting himself or others in danger during his explorations or tantrums. If he is having a meltdown in the middle of a bustling street, quickly remove him from danger. Try to stay calm while doing so. Remember, you are his role model, so choose your reactions wisely.

2 Check in with Yourself

Once you ensure your child's safety, it's time to hit your own reset button. Take a full deep breath. Dissolve any anger or frustration. Tune in to your body and relax any tense muscles. Now let go of expectations, including that of your child's compliance.

3 Use Empathy

Now put yourself in your child's shoes. What is he feeling? Why is he feeling that way? Bring yourself to his eye level. If he is sitting down, sit with him. Tell him what you think he is feeling and why. If your child likes touch, give him a hug or hold his hand. When he feels understood, he will be open to work with you in reaching a resolution. A child's misbehavior is often a mode of communicating something deeper.

4 Identify and Address Triggers

Think of the last five tantrums. Do you notice a pattern? Look beneath the surface as there could be a deeper cause, such as transition to a new school, moving, parental stress (yes, even when you think you are doing a great job hiding it), bullying at school, being tired and hungry, or developmental delays. If you think his increased frustrations are due to speech or motor delays, or they seem odd, then consult a clinical professional. Otherwise, address what you think might be the underlying cause. If the trigger is your own stress, use stress relief strategies such as practicing mindfulness meditation daily. In fact, research shows improvements in a child's behavior even when just one parent practices meditation.

5 Communicate

Since tantrums are a child's way of communicating stress, they are also a great opportunity to teach them effective communication. The first step is to recognize that he is not throwing a tantrum to punish you. Listen carefully to what he is saying or doing. Understand where he is coming from and say it. For example, if he does not want to leave the playground after you give him a five-minute reminder, say, "I understand that the playground is a fun place and you want to play a bit more, but it is getting late for dinner. How about we come back again tomorrow?" When he hears these words, he realizes you understand why he is upset and you are offering him a solution. By modeling such communication, you will create a future expert communicator.

6

Become Mindful Together

You can prevent tantrums simply by giving your child the gift of your time. All you need is five minutes a day to play with him mindfully. Choose a time when you won't be rushed, such as after school. Let him take the lead. Repeat what you see him doing and saying. Praise him for his actions during this mindful playtime. Enjoy becoming a child with him! This will boost his confidence and enrich the parent-child relationship.

7

Teach Correct Response

Once you build a solid foundation of trust, your child will be more receptive to being disciplined. Discipline is not about punishing. It is a way to gently teach boundaries, so your child can navigate the world smoothly. When you give instructions, you set him up for success. If you want him to listen to your instructions, give precise, short, three-step instructions. Remember that a child's attention span is short. He may not listen to you because he simply forgets long and vague instructions. When your child listens, praise him for it. Be specific as to why you are praising. You could even set up a reward system. If your child is being stubborn, offer him a couple of options so he feels that he is making the final decision, not you.

In the end, see if you can become mindful and take the "power" out of the power struggle between you and your little explorer. Be patient with yourself and your child. Use this bump in the road as a learning experience for both of you.

Ayman Mukerji Househam is a former Wall Street executive, longtime meditator and yogi, and researcher of mindfulness physiology who teaches mindfulness to families, corporations, and individuals. A clinical social worker in training, Ayman combines Eastern meditation with Western therapeutic techniques, and she is an active speaker on this topic. She authored a book on neural findings in the autism spectrum disorder, and her recent scientific publications and TEDx talk unravel how mindfulness practice changes our immune system, gut, and even our genes. www.ayman-mukerji.com

POEM

Afraid of Drowning

by Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay

Mother said
they already knew
that the communist soldiers
were on their way to her father's house
because he was a provincial governor,
he was one of the firsts on their lists.
They had many lists.

Mother never told me more than that,
stopping when the flooding of memories slowed her breathing.
So the stories I don't know,
I imagine:

I was in my mother's belly
when they were heading towards the river.
My brother was about a year and half.
They said he was a good baby—never cried—
they didn't drug him with opium as the others had.
He mostly slept, carried by my father.
Some of the children never woke up
and were buried along the way—
like bread crumbs in a fucked up fairy tale
reminding them how to find their homes again.

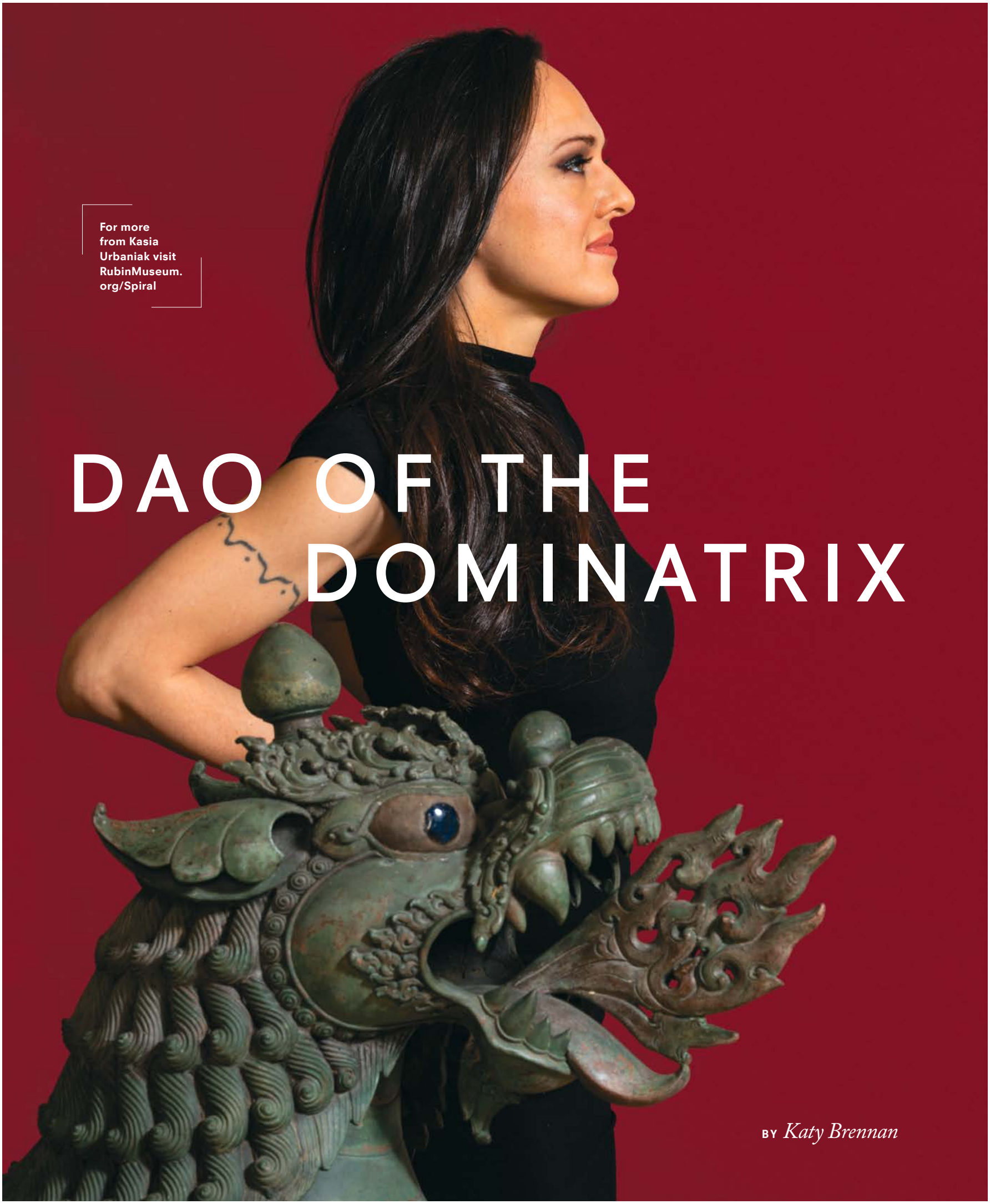
I felt my mother's heart began to pump fast
when they reached the river.
Instinctively, I reached upwards
and massaged it with translucent hands.

She never learned how to swim
having been raised in the city.
Not like my father—who was raised in the countryside
and he has swam this river before
so he wasn't afraid.
He's never afraid—
even when he trekked the dirt road with his parents to ask for my mother's hand in marriage—
even when everyone on both sides said it was a bad idea,
blasphemous almost,
a country bumpkin and a governor's daughter.
but here they are
everyone from both sides
standing in front of the river
escaping to the same place.
My mother said some brought plastic bags
to help them cross the river
because they couldn't swim.

Along the shore—
on the Lao side,
husbands inflated bags as best they could for their wives,
who carried their babies on tired backs.
dotted in the muddy river
black heads bobbing
black plastic bags keeping black heads above water.
sometimes people didn't make it across
and got taken away by the current
but still they held onto their bags
afraid of drowning.
Some husbands gave themselves to the unsympathetic river to help their wives,
Some blamed themselves for not inflating the bags better.

Along the shore—
on the Thailand side,
husbands hugged the ones that made it
while others fell on their knees with grief.
My father didn't have a plastic bag.
He swam my mother across,
my brother tied high on his back,
and me,
still in her belly,
massaging her heart with my hands.

Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay is a Lao American writer focused on creating tools and spaces for the amplification of refugee voices. Her plays have been presented by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center and Consortium of Asian American Theater Artists. She is an Aspen Ideas Bush Foundation scholar, a Playwrights Center fellow, a Loft Literary Center fellow, and a Theater Mu fellow, and she has been awarded creative grants from the Jerome Foundation, Knight Foundation, and Forecast Public Art, among others. @REFUGENIUS



For more from Kasia Urbaniak visit RubinMuseum.org/Spiral

DAO OF THE DOMINATRIX

BY *Katy Brennan*

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICHOLAS CALCOTT

What do a Daoist nun and a dominatrix have in common?

Female empowerment guru Kasia Urbaniak is in a position to know—and what she knows is helping women expand their power and find their voice.

JUST OVER FIVE YEARS AGO, Kasia Urbaniak founded The Academy, a school that teaches women the foundations of power and influence. Today, her teachings are more popular than ever. Her unique curriculum represents a total paradigm shift for both women and men.

In Academy lexicon, the word "you" is dominant and the word "I" is submissive. Neither is inherently superior. "If I'm in control of you, my attention is outward, so precisely fixed on the other person that I almost forget I exist," Kasia explains, "If you're submissive, your attention is focused inward, on yourself and your feelings."

This exchange of self for other is common to many Eastern spiritual traditions, including both Daoism and Buddhism. Contrary to what Western culture teaches us about the primacy of the self, a shift in focus towards the other can be surprisingly liberating, expansive, and empowering as well as compassionate. When we focus on the other, we let go of our limited, perhaps somewhat fearful and defensive sense of self. In essence, forgetting we exist in this way allows us to realize our fullest potential and to become much more beneficial and effective.

"I believe that the most compassionate thing a teacher can offer is the most practical thing," Kasia says. Her highly practical and timely teachings designed to help women expand their power are born out of two seemingly opposite but surprisingly symbiotic endeavors: training as a Daoist healer and nun and working as one of the world's most successful dominatrixes.

"Spiritual journeys can be expensive," she explains of her travels to the far reaches of the Far East seeking out teachings from the great masters of Daoist alchemy. "I was working as a dominatrix to make money. It was the best way that my nineteen-year-old self could pay for college, support my sister, and travel around the world looking for all the most magical masters I could dream of studying with; I could afford to be fanciful and adventurous."

But as she began to see both experiences as trainings, her occupation and her avocation started playing together in unexpected ways.

"In the very beginning, the domination and the Daoism were very far from each other. I was doing one in order to do the other. As a student, I was learning martial arts and how to diagnose human bodies, to see the intention of energy in somebody's chi, whether they wanted to attack or pull away, when they energetically expanded or when they contracted. I started to see the energy in medical diagnosis, where something's stagnant and where it's moving. I didn't expect this to happen, but the same things started showing up for me as a dominatrix in the dungeon—this expansion and contraction of energy; where somebody was really held in my attention and under my authority became palpable and obvious.

"When I watched some of the best dominatrixes in the world do their work I saw similarities between what they were doing and what the nuns I knew in China were doing. They were energetically super grounded and also willing and able to penetrate energetically the space of an other. In the case of the dominatrix, meaning the space of a man.

"I started seeing this wild disparity between powerful and less powerful women. On the one hand, I saw how both dominatrixes and Daoist nuns were solidly grounded in their power, while the vast majority of women I knew were struggling with a mass of assumptions, superstitions, and fears about men, love, romance and men, power, work, career. There's always an energetic precedent to losing your voice, not being able to stand in your power. It has to do with this retraction of energy.

"For many years of the years I studied Daoist alchemy, most teachers were men. I was hungry to delve deeper into the manipulation of the female hormone system, so I found one of the highest level female Daoist abbots in China in one of the country's oldest female-led monasteries.

"In this monastery, I reached the point where I was ready to completely commit myself to this path. But four days before I was to be ordained, I got a call from my mother that she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Making the choice between staying and going, I just felt, instinctively, that I'd been doing all of this all these years so I could be there for mother in that moment. On that day that I landed in Warsaw, Poland, where my mother lives, in 2008, China experienced one of its biggest earthquakes in history and the epicenter was forty-five kilometers from the convent."

She lived, not only to help her mother beat cancer, but to launch a career as a teacher, devoted to helping other women access their power.

Self-identified spiritual people sometimes talk of being "in the world, but not of it" in terms of shifting our deepest intentions toward more meaningful, less mundane goals and transcending cultural assumptions and limitations. But this can be a tricky balance, especially if we want to be of benefit to the world in which we live.

This has been a central theme for Kasia. "At the very end of my Daoist training, when my mom got sick, I very suddenly became 'of the world' and it all became, in an instant, intensely personal and practical," she says. What became most practical for her at that time was a shift from a male clientele to a focus on the female, but with the lessons of the dungeon still informing her work.

"The most common misperception about being a dominatrix is that it's about sex," Kasia explains. "It's erotic, energetically, but it's actually the one place that you are not allowed to have sex. One of my biggest challenges as a dominatrix was to be able to create an hour-long session primarily based on language and attention. You have to bring the erotic in the room and make it fully expansive and satisfying and have it peak and arc without sex. As I mastered that, I started understanding how all attention is essentially erotic because it carries the life force. Feeling alive is erotic. So many things that weren't sex or sexual started becoming erotic for me. I felt the viscosity of attention, the ability to use attention as an erotic force, and it blew my mind.

"When I left the dungeon, I realized I was more awake to how alive the world is. Instead of dividing things into good and evil, I saw things as alive and dead, hot and cold. I started moving toward what was alive because I knew it was going to turn me on, physically, intellectually, spiritually . . . I was just looking for the life force. I started to use this to help dissolve stuck dynamics between couples, people who were lost in their heads or looking to overcome blocks in their careers. The fastest way to resolve these problems always had to do with finding the hottest spot and working from there."

The dominatrix led the Daoist, and vice versa. Whether her students are more interested in her background as a Daoist or as a Dominatrix, the time for her teachings is clearly now.

Katy Brennan is a writer, author, and Buddhist meditation teacher. She began her dharma practice fourteen years ago in her hometown of New York City and currently teaches weekly classes in the East Village.

I, TARA, WAS BORN AS A TEAR FROM THE EYE OF AVALOKITESVARA...
— A DROP OF COMPASSION, SHED FOR THIS WORLD OF SUFFERING.
WHEN THE MONKS CAME UPON ME IN PRAYER, THEY LAUGHED:
IF YOU SEEK ENLIGHTENMENT THEN PRAY YOU'LL BE REBORN AS A MAN!
I DID NOT HEED THEM,
FOR IT IS ONLY THE WEAK-MINDED OF THIS WORLD...
... WHO SEE GENDER AS ANY OBSTACLE AT ALL.

THE LIBERATION OF TARA

Jia Sung is a Singaporean Chinese artist and educator, born in Minnesota, bred in Singapore, and now based in Brooklyn. She is an art director at Guernica, a 2018–2019 Smack Mellon Studio Artist, and a recipient of the Van Lier Fellowship.

HEAR ME ROAR

Vajrayogini; Kham Province, eastern Tibet; late 19th century; pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation; F1997.19.2 (HAR 290)

WHAT BUDDHISM CAN TEACH US ABOUT #METOO

Lama Tsultrim Allione shares how embracing the sacred feminine can help bring our world into healthy balance.

BY *Sarah Zabrodski*

Sarah Zabrodski: When did the sacred feminine in Buddhism emerge?
Lama Tsultrim Allione: In the Tantric period from 700 to 1200, during the Pala Dynasty in India, there was a shift from the earlier Buddhist focus on renunciation to the path of transformation using the energy of the five poisons to transform them into the five wisdoms. Historically this was a paradigm shift, and at this time, the presence of the feminine asserted itself in Buddhism, and with it came the concept of embodiment as sacred. The attitude to the body shifted from focusing on it as being putrid, decaying, and impermanent—in order to facilitate renunciation—into the body as a sacred mandala. Practices of the subtle body, such as yoga, breath control, and sacred sexuality were key in the Tantric Buddhist path. This shift was important in terms of female empowerment, and you begin to see female gurus, female deities, and female buddhas in the Tantric period. Historically all over the world, whenever embodiment rather than transcendence is honored in religion, so is the feminine.

What are the parallels between the Tantric period and our world today?
The Tantric period allowed the feminine to come forward. In the story of Naropa, he is outside reading a book on logic and epistemology, and the shadow of an old hag falls across the book. She tells him that he doesn't understand the meaning; he just understands the words. So there's a more intuitive relationship being called for—a more direct, nonconceptual relationship with the world. The hag is old and ugly in this story; Naropa actually analyzes her thirty-seven ugly features, looking at the yellow hair growing from her chin and her drooling mouth. She symbolizes the neglected feminine, and the way he analyzes her demonstrates his obsession with logic.

I see our world in a similar situation. As the feminine rises, as she is now, she might appear to be ugly or angry. That's because she has been neglected and repressed. Naropa goes through the process of shifting into and accepting a more direct, intuitive part of himself when he leaves the monastery to find his guru. His story relates to ours in the sense that we've been caught in a very logos-dominated culture. We worship science. Perhaps there is another way of knowing that is working with the meaning, symbolic language—not the words—which is the distinction the hag makes. This is an aspect of the sacred feminine.

What can we take away from these stories for our own historical moment?
First, the destiny of women and the destiny of nature have historically been parallel. When women have been abused, so has nature. We are in a situation now where the abuse of nature is coming back at us, with a vengeance, with climate change, pollution, environmental illnesses, and so on. The repressed feminine is coming back at us with her anger and the parallel anger of women with the Women's Marches and #MeToo.

In my book *Wisdom Rising*, I talk about the *dakini*—a sky-dancing female deity—as a manifestation of the fierce feminine, but her fierceness is imbued with wisdom. It's not just anger. I describe how there is a way to transform the anger into empowerment through the meditation practice of "in"powerment. In the Mandala of the Five Dakinis practice, through visualization and sound we can identify with the embodied wise feminine in her fierce form. This offers a process of transformation for our anger that transforms it into both empowerment and "in"powerment, inner power.

How do we reconcile the concept of non-duality with female power?
There is absolute truth and relative truth, which are very important to distinguish. At the absolute level, gender has no relevance. In fact, there is no gender. In the story of Tara, she is told she can't become enlightened in the body of a woman; she has to come back in the body of a man. She responds, "I know that all concepts of gender are just for fools, but since there are few who have reached enlightenment in the body of a woman and so many who have reached enlightenment in the body of a man, I will reach enlightenment in the body of a woman."

Some have the belief that feminism is dualistic, and that if you really are an advanced practitioner, you can't possibly be a feminist. But that is a misunderstanding of relative and absolute truth. Gandhi said that anyone who thinks that politics are not spiritual doesn't understand spirituality. Our political or sociological values are directly imprinted by and associated with our spiritual values. If we look at the situation of women today, so much of the oppression of women comes through religious values. Those attitudes are also dualistic—the split between spirit and matter—with women needing to be controlled and dominated to reach transcendence. That's the split—not understanding the difference between the absolute and the relative truth—because at the absolute level gender is absolutely irrelevant. And at the relative level it is absolutely relevant.

How has your experience of the sacred feminine shifted over time?
I hadn't really thought that much about the sacred feminine until I lost my daughter to SIDS, and her death was a wake-up call because afterwards I really needed the stories of women. I wondered how did other women in Buddhism deal with this kind of experience? Certainly it would be different than men. The story of the Buddha wasn't helping me. He left his wife and son in the middle of the night and went on his quest. I wasn't going to leave my children. That was the beginning of the awakening for me of an awareness about the sacred feminine and women.

In preparation for writing my first book, *Women of Wisdom*, I started to study the history of women in Buddhism and found extremely misogynist ideas. Then I discovered the *dakinis*, and I could relate to them because I was not a nun at that point. I was a woman; I was sexual; I was a mother. I was not a renunciate. The *dakinis* had long hair and they were dancing and they were wild. They were undomesticated, and I could never really identify with the domesticated female even though I was a wife and a mother. I always felt a wildness in me that I didn't want to lose.

What is one step that someone could take toward embracing and cultivating their inner female power, regardless of their gender identity?
One of the main ways that the female wound expresses itself is in our attitude toward our bodies—the feeling that the female body is problematic and somehow never quite right so you have to keep fixing it. I recommend an exercise in which you lie down and touch parts of your body, sending each part acceptance. Starting with your feet, move up to your calves and your thighs, then gradually touch your whole body, embracing your body as sacred and sending it love and appreciation. This can also be done by men, because this split of our spirit and body is part of spirituality for men too, though women have a harder time accepting their bodies. The process of going through and accepting each part of your body as sacred can be very emotional for some people and also very healing.

Any final words?
It would be great to move out of male hierarchy in Buddhism (and in the world) and into a more inclusive power structure and have women be fully trained to lead. This is beginning to happen in Asia and in America. If there were more women teachers perhaps there would be less sexual abuse and less of a "power over" relationship and more of a "power with" approach.

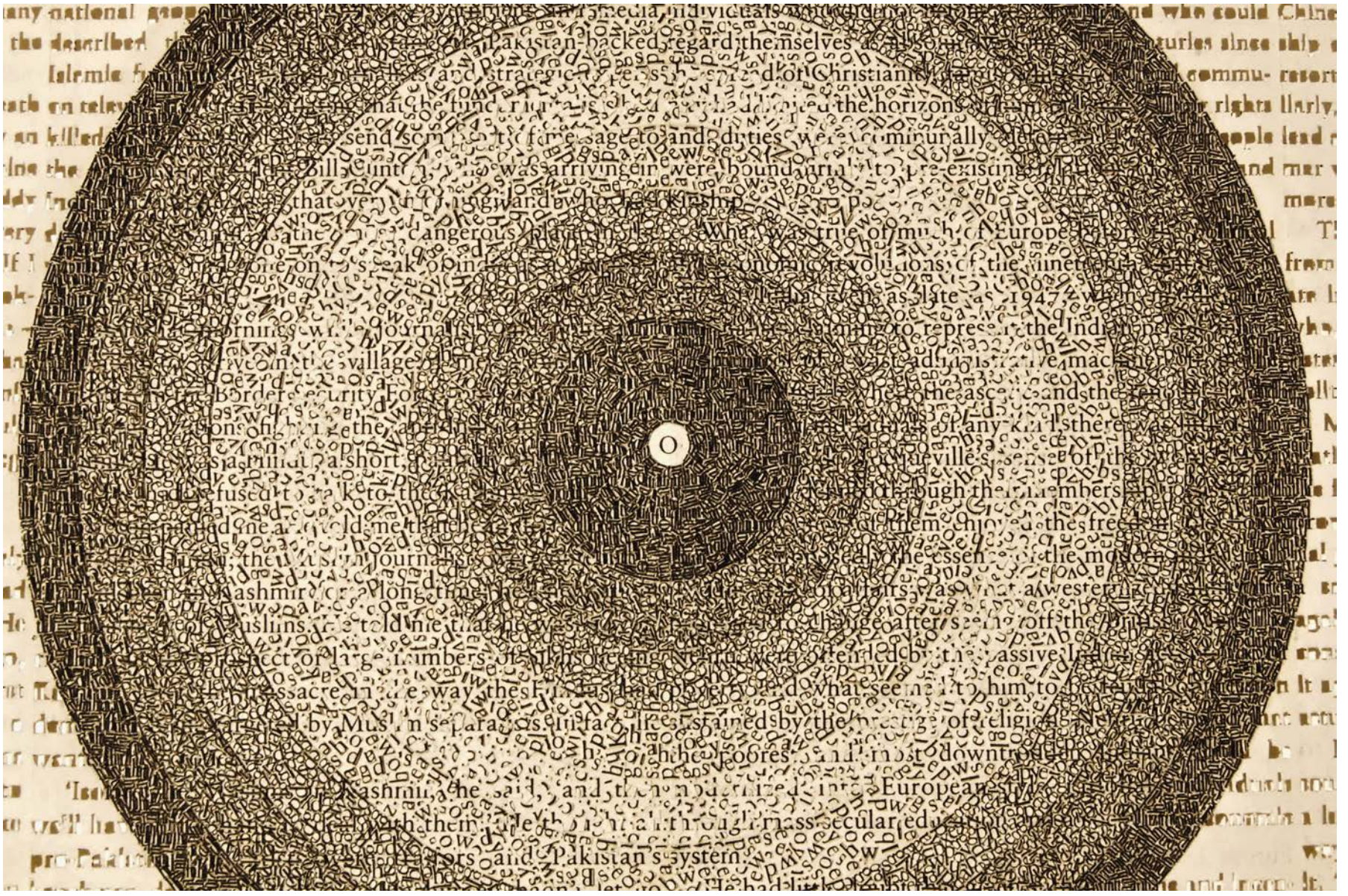
I use those words, because when some people hear or read a book like *Wisdom Rising*, they think I just want women to take over. That's not what I suggest. I want a partnership society. And a partnership society is power with, not power over. My emphasis on the feminine is in order to come into healthy balance.

Read an extended interview with Lama Tsultrim Allione at RubinMuseum.org/Spiral.

Lama Tsultrim Allione is an internationally known Buddhist teacher and the founder and resident lama of Tara Mandala Retreat Center. She is the author of *Women of Wisdom*, the national bestseller *Feeding Your Demons: Ancient Wisdom for Resolving Inner Conflict*, which is now translated into twenty languages, and *Wisdom Rising: Journey into the Mandala of the Empowered Feminine*. She has a master's degree in Buddhist Studies/Women's Studies from Antioch University, and she was named Buddhist Woman of the Year in 2009.

Sarah Zabrodski is the editor and publications manager at the Rubin Museum of Art.

ACCIDENTALLY



Two artists featured in *The Power of Intention: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel* put commitment and belief at the heart of their practices.

BY *Elena Pakhoutova*

ON PURPOSE

CONVERSATIONS WITH MONIKA BRAVO AND YOUDHI MAHARJAN

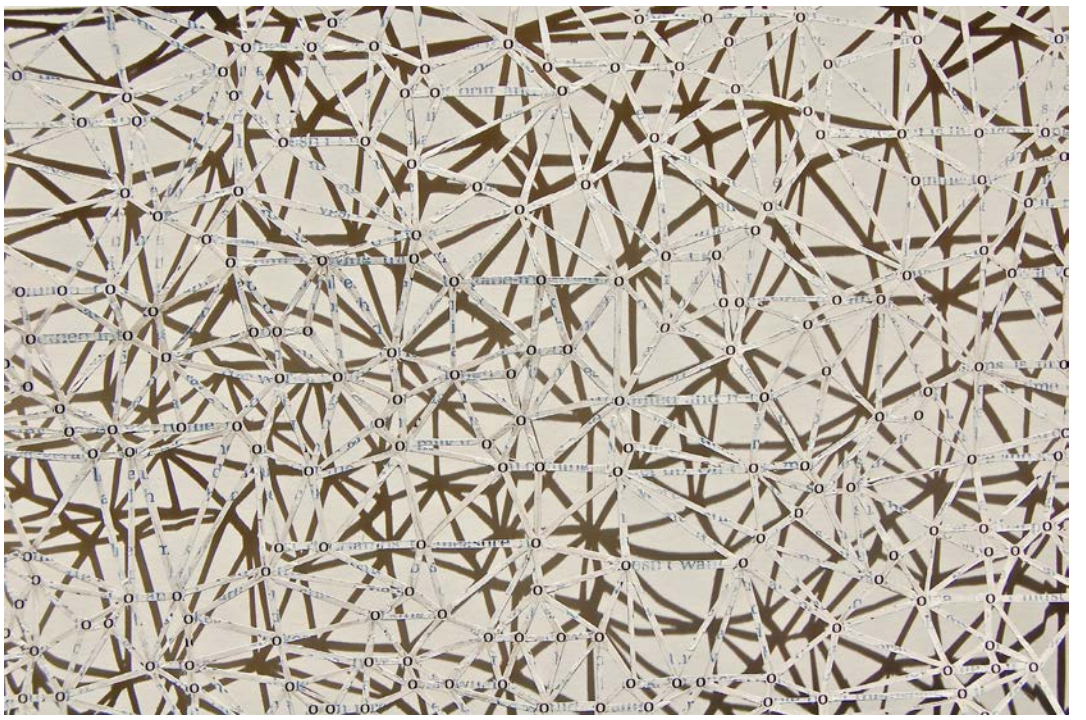
WE MAY NOT THINK that intentions have power, but in Buddhist culture they define the quality of any action. Commitment and belief are key mental attitudes needed to harness the power of intentions, embodied quite literally in Tibetan prayer wheels. The clockwise rotation of such wheels is believed to propel the thousands of written prayers and mantras contained within these ritual objects into the world.

The works of Youdhi Maharjan and Monika Bravo are as different as the artists' personalities yet exemplify these ideas, and the two share strong connections in their approaches to creativity and the meaning of art. Together with the other artists featured in the exhibition *The Power of Intention: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel*, which brings together select examples of traditional and contemporary art, they take the Tibetan prayer wheel on a conceptual spin.

Maharjan creates intricate collages out of reclaimed book pages through a meticulous process that demonstrates incredible commitment, a state of being that is central to the Buddhist understanding of intention and practice. Although he is not a Buddhist, his familiarity with the philosophical, literary, and intellectual wealth of Indic cultural traditions shines through in his work and conversations.

Bravo explores questions of human perception and the decoding of information through a range of media. She draws from her creative experiences in fields from fashion design to photography, as well as from her practice in her native Bogotá and in the United States. Bravo actively works with and manifests emotional states in her work, specifically the powerful notion of belief, which is essential to empowering intention.

Both artists find joy in creating art, working with text, and transforming it into something new, and they find this process empowering. They believe that text can restrict us by delivering its meaning too easily and taking over the reader's mind. The artists' creative manipulation of text allows new meanings to be revealed. Each person who sees the text encounters it anew and makes it their own. Even though their art forms vary dramatically, Maharjan and Bravo both "accidentally" discovered the books that inform their works in the exhibition, attracted by their titles, but they employed those texts with purpose and intention.



Youdhistir Maharjan (b. 1984, Kathmandu, Nepal); *Power of Thought* (detail); 2018; cutout text collage on reclaimed book pages; 22 1/8 x 30 5/8 in; courtesy of the artist

YOUDHI MAHARJAN AND THE POWER OF COMMITMENT

Elena Pakhoutova: Your work is a perfect example of the power of commitment. It takes determination and patience to work each page in a very precise manner. How does it help you realize the finished piece? Do you have an image of what the piece will look like?

Youdhi Maharjan: The end result is not determined but the process is. I decide in the beginning what to do with the book, what steps or formula to use, whether to cut all around the letter *O* and connect the *O*s with straight lines or organic lines. It is based on the title of the book which inspires the visual work, and the work interprets and gives a new meaning to the title. The process is very monotonous, doing the same thing over and over. In *Turning the Wheel* (2018), I pierced the book pages with needles in repeating circles, cut individual letters, and then glued

them back in *Committed to Becoming* (2018). There are surprising elements in this process. It is labor intensive; it hurts my fingers, eyes, and back, and I have to prepare mentally. I get joy from doing this, even if it seems mundane. I am making something by hand, myself.

Are you saying it is an empowering feeling?
Yes, like finding the meaning of your existence. We live today in a technological age. Everything is faster. We save so much time, and what we do with that time? Do we spend it watching Netflix or doing or making something? To me the process is important. I can do the same thing using technology and get the "product" done in a few minutes. My investment, my relationship with the materials and the process—touching the book physically, engaging with the process, cutting one letter at a time—gives me the encouragement, the power I need to commit to do this again and again.

The process itself is what gives you the power to keep doing it?
Yes, the more I work the more I get into it.

How would you define power?
For example, the power of prayer is not about the prayer but the power of intent. Why you pray is more important than the actual prayer. In the *Ramayana* story, monkeys write the name of Rama on every stone. The stones float in the ocean, and that's how the bridge to Sri Lanka was built. It's not by writing Rama's name on these stones that they don't sink but by the power of faith and aspiration. I think some people pray to get something out of it, but for myself, I produce works because I find meaning in the production of these works. In a similar way, rabbis, priests, or monks find happiness in praying. When you take your focus out of the end product and do anything you find joy in doing, the process itself is the end in itself and is not the means to get something.

This is different from how people generally think—you do something to get something and want immediate satisfaction. Your work is the opposite of that.
Very opposite. I slow down time, so it is an opportunity to slow down from the materialistic life. It allows me to reflect on different questions we don't usually ask on a daily basis.

Such as?
Such as the meaning of happiness, existence and the purpose of life, relationships, love, god, spirituality, inner world versus outer world. When you have an intent and no expectations, then you are fully committed to action. When you are focused on the result of your action, you are distracted. It's like going from point A to point B and only focusing on getting there, whether you fly, drive, or walk. But when you are focused on driving or walking, you actually enjoy whatever you do rather than missing everything that happens.

Can you talk about the most time-consuming piece you worked on?
It is the piece I worked on using newspapers as material. I handwove found newspapers into very long pieces of rope. Hypothetically, these do not have a beginning and end. I will be making them until my body can't make them. It is nine miles long now.

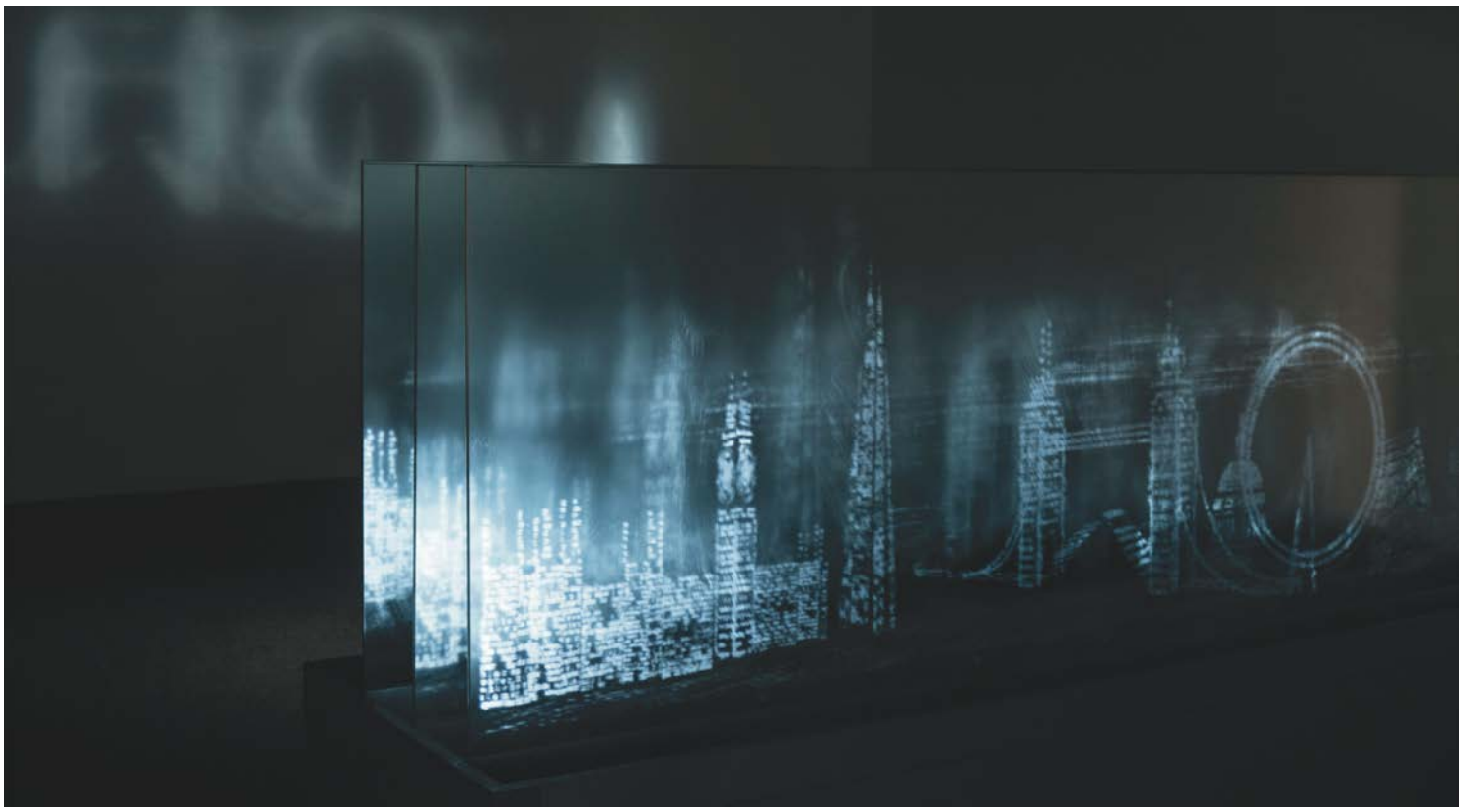
Why are you committed to continue working on it?
It is a relationship. I am engaged in the process and this gives me meaning, and my engagement with the object gives meaning and purpose to this useless newspaper.

So you create meaning through working and when people look at the work they discover meaning themselves?
Always.

Your artistic practice is repetitive work. It's like turning the prayer wheel—it does not do anything but the idea is that something is happening.
Yes, like turning the prayer wheel, something is happening, an active engagement in the process, but it is not mindless, thoughtless engagement.

When I looked at the *Power of Thought* (2018) and read the title, I immediately thought of neurons in a brain.
Yes, interconnectedness. This work is also about the fragility of our faith and our intentions. We can very easily become distracted, tempted to do something else. Having a wish does not do much; you have to have a will as well.

See works by Monika Bravo and Youdhi Maharjan in the exhibition *The Power of Intention: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel* at the Rubin Museum.



Monika Bravo (b. 1964, Bogotá, Columbia); *Landscape of Belief*; 2012; glass, mirror, projector, media player, aluminum, wood, text from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, time-based electronic installation; courtesy of the artist and Johannes Vogt Gallery

MONIKA BRAVO AND THE POWER OF BELIEF

Elena Pakhoutova: What can you tell me about your artistic practice and process?

Monika Bravo: It depends on the project. Some things come to me as images, as concepts. It's how I process my own reality; I get insights and then I have to materialize them. I have been practicing meditation for a long time, so I can observe my emotion and transform it into something else. I have a method of doing this—a lot of observation. *Landscape of Belief* (2012) came from a moment when I was not feeling very good. At the time I had an idea that I had to do certain things to achieve something, but it was not happening, and I was taking this personally, thinking my work and I were not good enough. I was really suffering. I was supposed to be in a gallery exhibition, but they told me, "Don't take it personally, but we didn't have time to put your work in the show." I felt devastated. I was trying to be brave that day, but I wasn't. At the time Marina Abramović was not that famous. At the opening dinner, this woman I sort of recognized sat next to me, and we started talking. I didn't tell her anything directly, but she was very perceptive and said, "Don't you ever give your power away to anybody. You have to go inward and find your own power. You are very powerful, but you don't know it yet." So I took these feelings and decided to do something with them. I took the title of the show, *Textual Landscape*, and I said to myself, I'm going to create the most amazing piece. I closed my eyes and started imagining the piece—it was a landscape but it was also a text, maybe a cityscape.

I started imagining a building, making drawings, taking images from Google that fit my feeling—lightness, light, transparency, no color—which is unusual because my work is very colorful. I didn't really know how I would do this, and I asked a friend to help me hire an assistant for animation. It's always about what I feel when perceiving my reality. This is the process. This work took three years to make. I had an assistant each year.

My first idea was to make this on the wall, but I needed to express a sense of freedom and wanted to put myself away from the wall and into the center. I also felt that I was being very vulnerable, and working with glass is being vulnerable. A lot of materials I use are about manifestation of the body. Very often when people think of the spiritual they forget about the body, or they are so engrossed in their bodies they don't understand that the spirit is there. So understanding that the body is the vehicle of our spirit has to be represented. That's why *Landscape of Belief* is glass and in the center, because there is a possibility it will break, a certainty that we are going to die but not knowing when. This tension I like and use in my work a lot. I didn't know what text I'd use. I knew it was about belief.

Why belief?

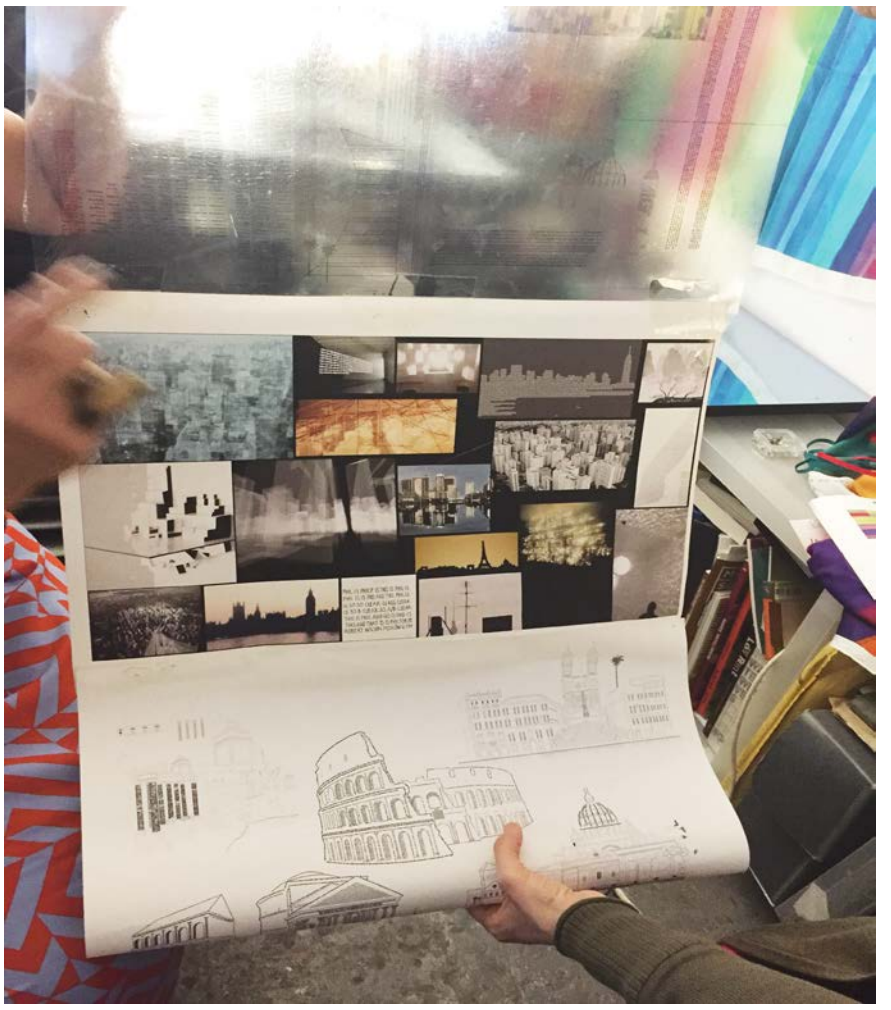
It's very important. I was feeling that the work was what I was believing or not believing myself. I was giving the power to other people to believe that I am capable or not capable. When we assign values to ideas and we practice them, they become beliefs embedded as belief systems. You believe an idea, you practice it a lot, and it becomes your reality. I believe that we are creating every moment. I wanted to do a project that went very deep into the fact that we are creating these realities and we are all responsible for them. People tend to blame everything on the other and always talk about society outside of themselves, but they don't acknowledge that every situation, every idea, every action is connected to something. What you do every day is changing reality. This is the only thing that I have power over.

I didn't want the text to be dogmatic. When you talk about a book, it already has an identity, like cities too. The text came after meditation. I was working with numbers until then and needed a text. One day, about a year and a half into the project, I heard about Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, and I went online and bought it. I opened it, and this was the book. It was like downloading something into my head.

How does *Landscape of Belief* relate to the exhibition *The Power of Intention: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel*?

There are seven animations of cities that continuously appear, and between them is a little lapse of two seconds that is most important to me. It's this moment where there is nothing. It refers to the moment when your mind is open and you allow anything to come through. Things like architecture or literature restrict you, draw you along. You are not yourself really; they define you, and you lose yourself in there, and when you lose yourself, you are not aware and are reactive. Those seconds when there is nothing, the moment when we can still our mind and we are open, that's when we become aware, and when we are aware, we can make an intention that is so strong it actually happens.

Read extended interviews with the artists at RubinMuseum.org/Spiral.



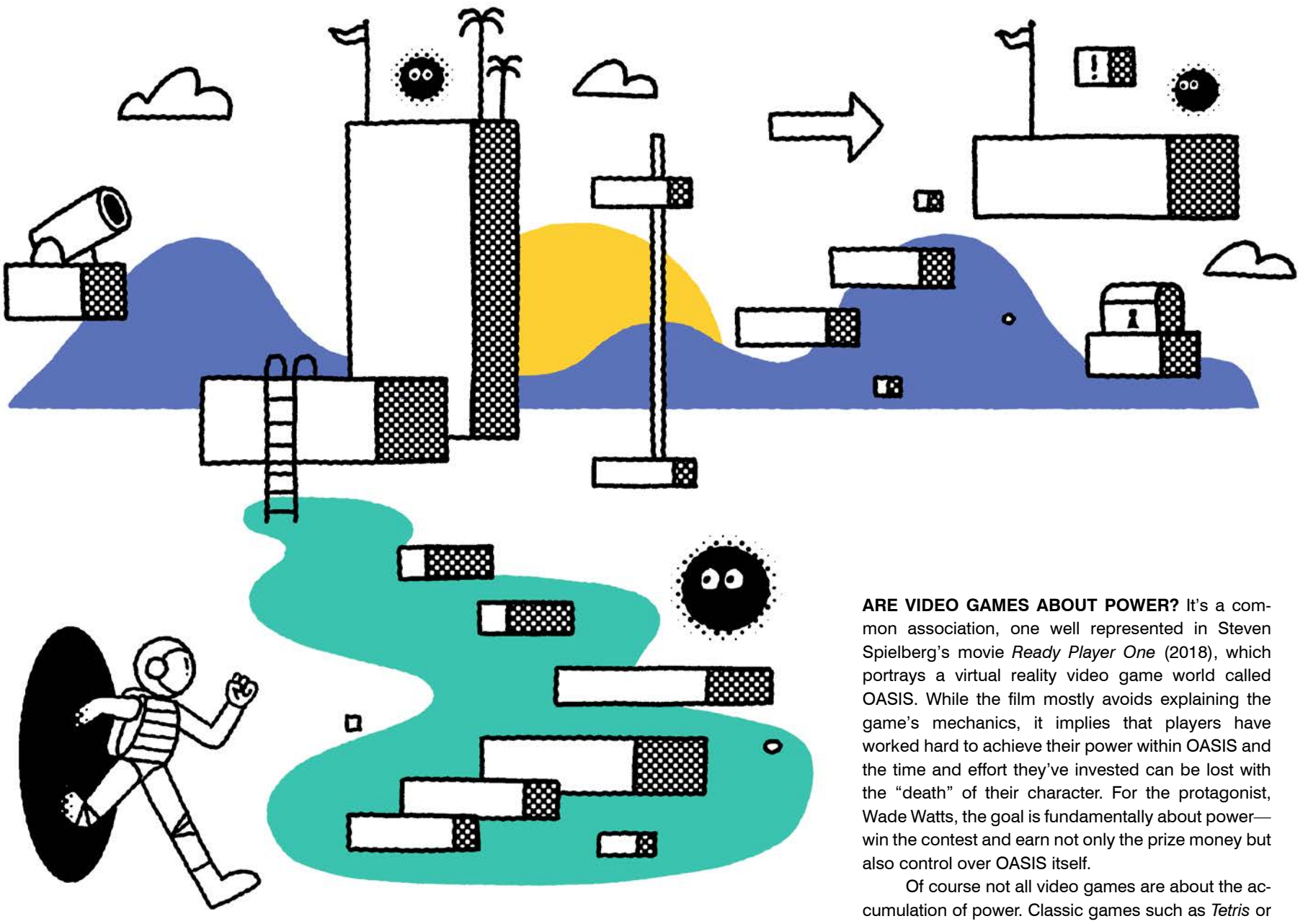
Sketches for *Landscape of Belief* in Monika Bravo's studio

Monika Bravo is a multidisciplinary artist born in Bogotá, Colombia, who currently lives in New York City. She studied fashion design in Rome and Paris and photography in London. One of her most well-known works is *September 10, 2001, Uno Nunca Muere La Vispera* (2001), dedicated to artist Michael Richards who died in the 9/11 attacks. Bravo represented the Vatican City-State in the 56th Venice Biennale, with the commissioned installation *ARCHE-TYPES: The sound of the word is beyond sense (2015)*.

Youdhi Maharjan is a visual artist from Nepal who currently resides in New Hampshire. He works with repurposed texts to create a new language, exploring the materiality of text and reasserting its thingness. Through his work, he tackles complex dichotomies, such as spirituality and nothingness, science and art, mass production and attention to detail, journey and final destination. He holds a BA in creative writing from New England College and an MFA in art history from the University of Idaho.

Elena Pakhoutova is a curator of Himalayan art at the Rubin Museum of Art and holds a PhD in Asian art history from the University of Virginia. She has curated several exhibitions at the Rubin, most recently *The Second Buddha: Master of Time* (2018) and *The Power of Intentions: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel* (2019).

THE STRUGGLE ITSELF



A video game developer explains how the quest for power keeps you playing

BY *Gavin Irby*

ARE VIDEO GAMES ABOUT POWER? It's a common association, one well represented in Steven Spielberg's movie *Ready Player One* (2018), which portrays a virtual reality video game world called OASIS. While the film mostly avoids explaining the game's mechanics, it implies that players have worked hard to achieve their power within OASIS and the time and effort they've invested can be lost with the "death" of their character. For the protagonist, Wade Watts, the goal is fundamentally about power—win the contest and earn not only the prize money but also control over OASIS itself.

Of course not all video games are about the accumulation of power. Classic games such as *Tetris* or *Mario Bros*. don't offer character progression, nor do more recent games like Telltale's *Walking Dead* series or Blizzard's *Overwatch*. These games are about making choices and mastering the game's mechanics.

But the acquisition of ever-greater power is at the core of the identity and purpose of the games like *World of Warcraft*, *Diablo*, *Skyrim*, and *Final Fantasy*. They offer persistent characters whose progress is not lost when the player signs off: time invested in the game is accumulated and rewarded.

I am currently a game designer for *Destiny*, which is a perfect example. The quest for higher levels and greater numbers—which translate as power—is the driving purpose behind nearly all the game's pursuits.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN SAVAGE

HOOKING THE PLAYER

Game designers build power progression into video games because it is incredibly effective at hooking the player. We know there is an undeniable satisfaction in seeing phrases like "YOU ARE NOW AT LEVEL 2" appear on your screen. It exploits the brain's dopamine reward system: the game asks the player to perform a series of actions and then rewards them with positive sensory feedback, in turn eliciting a dopamine response. This system is so effective that some people have accused popular games of fostering a kind of chemical dependency in their players.

This leveraging of the brain's reward system has also led to a cynical comparison between video games and a Skinner box: an enclosed apparatus used to study animal behavior. Players take on the role of the lab rat, repeatedly pressing a button to generate a reward. I think this is an unfair comparison, as no behavioral scientist has ever sought to enrich the internal life of a lab rat. The pursuit of power in games affords an incredible variety of experiences beyond the reward response—enjoying a story, mastering a challenge, making a friend, or participating in a community, just to name a few.

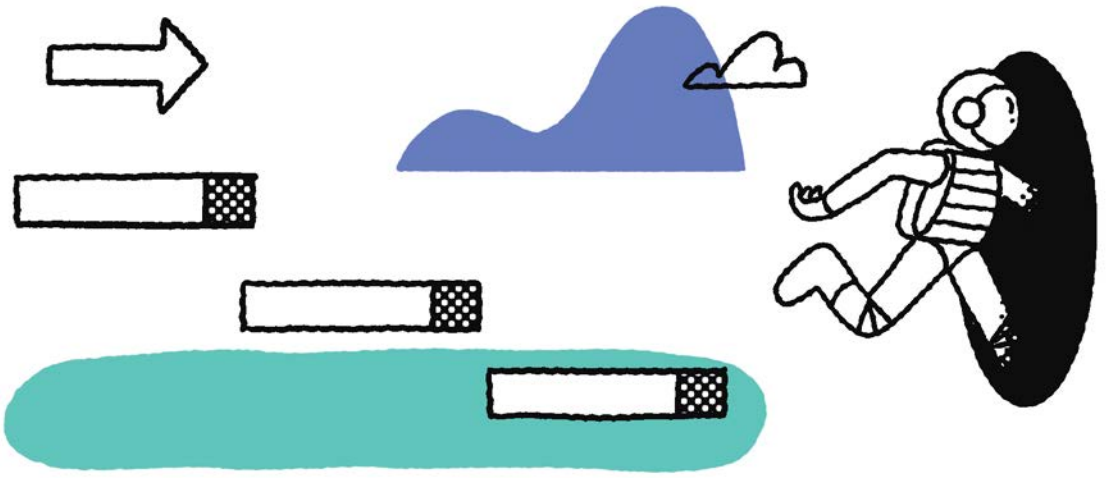
POWER PROGRESSIONS

But what is power in a video game? Typically it takes one of two forms. The first is an object external to the player's character, for example a magic sword or a piece of the Triforce. The second is an intrinsic quality of the player's character, represented with concepts like levels or stats like strength or intelligence. These representations of power are meaningful because they allow the player to overcome progressively greater obstacles.

Game designers have a unique, strange relationship with power. We are responsible for creating both the obstacle and the means to overcome it. Our job is to establish an emotionally satisfying friction to the player's inevitable progress. A common expression of this idea is the model in which the player overcomes an obstacle and is rewarded with the means to overcome the next obstacle. So players slay goblins until they attain a sufficient level to slay giants; then they slay giants until they attain a sufficient level to slay dragons; and on and on.

THE GRIND

The cyclical form of this structure is not lost on players, who often describe it as a kind of treadmill or hamster wheel. The term "grinding" emerged with the rise of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), such as *Ultima Online*, *Everquest*, *Dark Age of Camelot*, and *World of Warcraft*. It refers to repetitive activity intended to increase one's power.



These games are notorious for demanding hundreds of hours to reach the pinnacle levels.

It's a flippant analogy, but I think of grinding as a kind of asceticism. Players frequently compare stories about the hardships of their "grind" as a metric of their dedication to the game and an expression of the power they have achieved within it. Buddhist and Hindu traditions have examples of ascetics engaging in severe meditative practices to develop their *tapas*—a Sanskrit term meaning "heat" or "inner fire"—for the express purpose of growing in power.

Games like *World of Warcraft* or *Destiny* must sustain this progression over literally thousands of hours of play time. They are designed to function as self-contained hobbies, offering a persistent virtual fantasy world in which to explore your internal life. But this persistence has a side effect. If each obstacle the player overcomes provides the means to overcome the next obstacle—and there is no end of obstacles—what is the point? Isn't it akin to the myth of Sisyphus? To borrow words from the French philosopher Albert Camus, is the struggle itself toward the heights enough to fill a man's heart?

PROGRESS QUEST

When I consider these questions, I often think about the game *Progress Quest*, first released in 2002. It was a text-based role-playing game in the vein of *Dungeons & Dragons* that sat in the corner of your monitor while you did other activities on your computer. Beyond creating a character, the player did not have to interact with the game at all. It simply played itself. A ticker spewed out text describing the character's actions as they went about their business of slaying monsters and acquiring treasures. The game is satirical. It pokes fun at our obsession with the acquisition of power and wealth, which take precedence over substantive adventure and heroism.

Progress Quest was absurd, but it was also a remarkably compelling game. And while it was comedic, it was also prophetic. The many "clicker" and "idle"—collectively referred to as "incremental"—games like *Idle Heroes*, *Clicker Heroes*, and *Tap Titans* that currently populate the iTunes and Android stores are essentially iterations on the *Progress Quest* model. What once was satire has become a genre in its own right.

THE RISE OF AUTO-PLAY

Today in China many of the top mobile games fall into the role-playing game (RPG) genre. They often feature auto-play modes, so the specific tasks of adventuring are automated. Left alone, your character will wander about the world, fight monsters, collect treasures, and level up. Players need only concern themselves with macro-level decisions in their character's power progression. The game designers have abstracted the grind, allowing the player to slide into the observer seat at will.

It's tempting to view these games with condescension, as a game that plays itself can't be considered much of a game, right? But I think this perspective is misguided and passes over the reason behind the popularity of auto-play games. Rather than missing the point, auto-play games might actually reveal the point: humans derive an intrinsic satisfaction from observing progress.

Power progression in video games is a means of quantifying a need and representing that need visually. We feel satisfaction when we observe that need fulfilled. Our participation is no more a requirement for that satisfaction than the requirement that we actually hold the sword of ultimately slaying. It's enough to see your character wield it.

Power is progress, and progress is satisfying. Work is getting done. Things are getting better.

Gavin Irby is a lead designer at Bungie, Inc., where he works on the *Destiny* franchise. He has spent his career helping build online game worlds that support thousands of simultaneous players, including *Rift: Planes of Telara*, *Wildstar*, and *Pirates of the Burning Sea*. Prior to entering the games industry, Gavin attended the University of Virginia as a graduate student in the History of Religions Department, where he specialized in Sri Lankan Buddhism and Hinduism.

OUT WITH THE OLD:

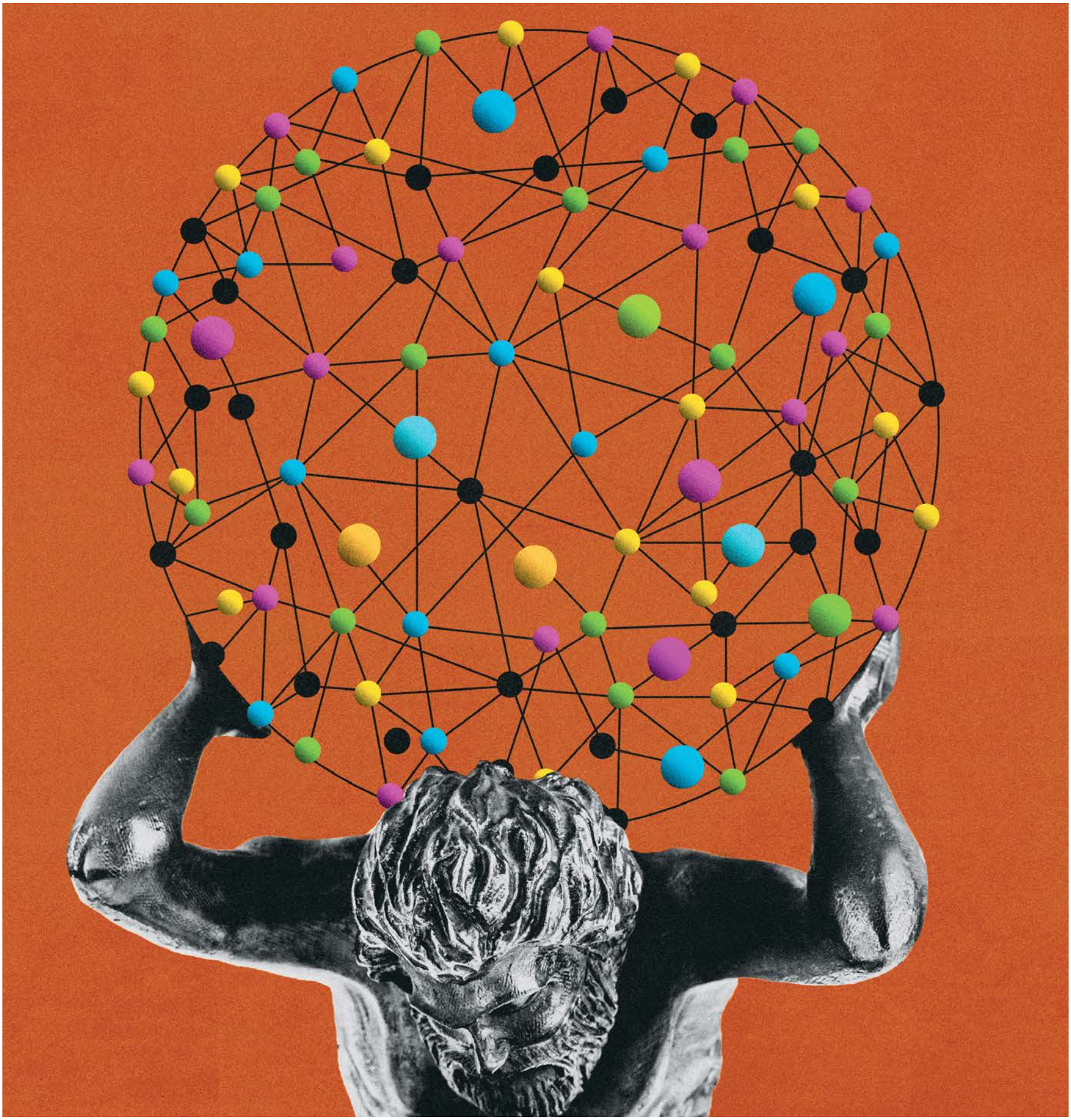


ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX MERTO

NEW POWER IS HERE TO STAY

Jeremy Heimans discusses social connections and dynamics in our brave, new hyperconnected world

BY *Aidan Young*

THE POWER OF THE CROWD gives us unprecedented opportunities to shift the status quo. Social movements like #MeToo and the gun violence prevention campaign #NeverAgain suggest that with more people at the table we can face society's darkest problems in new ways.

Jeremy Heimans is the co-founder and CEO of Purpose, an organization that helps build human-centered digital movements. He is also the co-author of *New Power*, which outlines the fall of Old Power values like competition and top-down authority to the New Power values of collaboration, transparency, and self-governance. All of us can harness New Power, according to Heimans, but its impact depends on how we use it.

Aidan Young: What can everyday people—or people as global citizens—do to thrive in a New Power environment?
Jeremy Heimans: Old Power and New Power are two different mindsets and different sets of skills. Most people who have succeeded and gotten to positions of authority in institutions have learned the Old Power skillset. You've learned to hoard stuff that you have, that you know, and that you control that others don't. You've learned to rely on dynamics that are closed. If you want to thrive on a New Power level, you need to learn how to use power not as currency but as current, harnessing this energy that you cannot hoard or control but that nonetheless can be incredibly powerful.

The book *New Power* starts with a comparison between Harvey Weinstein's Old Power and the New Power of #MeToo. People are not running #MeToo, they are not controlling that energy, but they are finding ways to use it in constructive ways to make change and to achieve their goal. With New Power, it's about creating models in which the energy comes not from what is downloaded but from what is uploaded, from systems that are open and not closed, from models that are peer-driven and not leader-driven.

More and more people are turning away from organized religion and embracing more open-ended terms like spiritual and practices like meditation. How does this shift relate to New Power?
I think you could argue that with more personal meditative practices there's a macro objective, which is partly about moving people away from the traditional conceptions of power: insecurity, hoarding power out of that insecurity, guarding it, seeing the world as a zero-sum game. The underlying philosophy that informs mindfulness meditative practices is about a noncompetitive orientation to the world, not seeing life as zero sum. This mode is about sharing and a deeper transparency and honesty in the way you approach the world. I think the argument is that if everybody meditated you would probably have different power dynamics in the world than if everybody was spending all of their time getting worked up on Twitter.

What is art's relationship to New Power?
The question is: In a world in which everybody is now much more able to produce art, where everybody is a creator in some form, expressing themselves creatively in a variety of mediums, what implications does that have for the future of art? Does that have implications for who emerges to become a major artist when you don't have the same gatekeeper model? How does art get democratized? Can more people break through? Do you get art that is, itself, more participatory? What would a world look like in which art is being produced collaboratively by many people? This is a form that we're seeing appear now in different ways.

Many people believe that power corrupts, particularly Old Power. Does New Power have the same potential to corrupt those who harness it?
The people who figure out how to harness the energy of these connected crowds don't necessarily have the motives that we do. There is an archetype of what we call a co-opter. Facebook is a great example. Facebook is a model that relies heavily on New Power dynamics, but it's clearly, at some level, co-opting our participation in order to consolidate power. We need to reimagine systems and models to minimize the co-opter dynamics. In the tech realm, we talk a lot about models that allow the users of platforms to actually co-own the platform, because that minimizes co-optation risk.

Where does compassion fit into a New Power world?
I think that a precursor of compassion is empathy and the experience of getting into another's shoes, working with and collaborating with people that might be different than you. There are definitely ways that New Power supercharges those dynamics, because in order to be effective in that environment, you have to learn how to work with people, not just how to compete with them.

I do think you see compassion manifest in some of these New Power movements. The Refugees Welcome movement, which began in 2015 after Alan Kurdi's lifeless body washed up ashore, created a wave of compassion for refugees. People started showing up in train stations in Munich, welcoming refugees that were coming into Germany. It led to major commitment by European governments to resettle refugees, most notably Angela Merkel's commitment to resettle a million refugees. That was New Power supercharging compassion.

Now, New Power also superpowers hate and division. So a big question for the future is who is going to mobilize this. For those who value compassion, openness, pluralism, and democracy, we've got to use this new tool, because if we don't, the other side will.

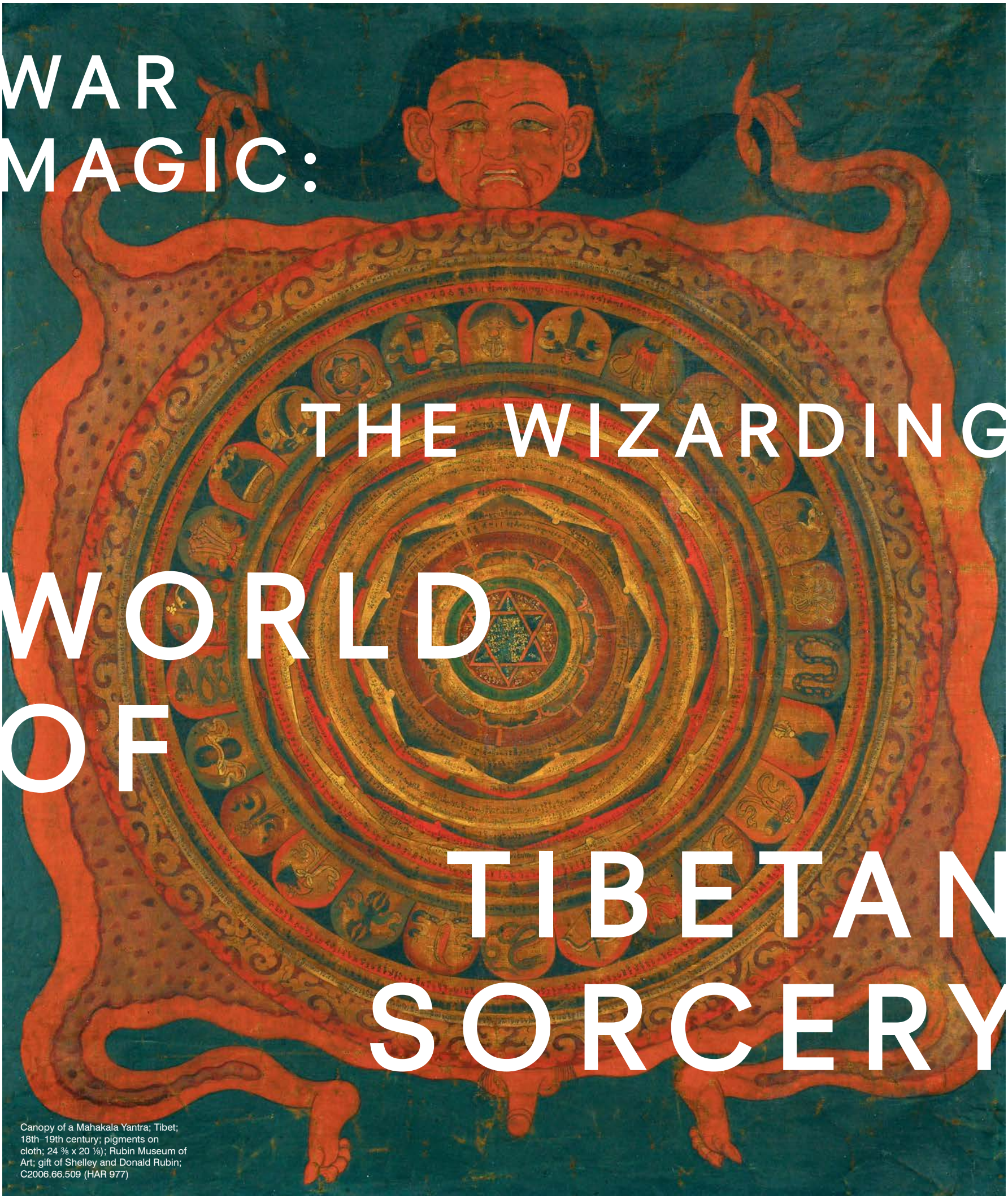
Is technology the only catalyst for New Power? What would happen if social media disappeared tomorrow?
There is no doubt that New Power is enabled by the fact that we're now all ubiquitously, constantly, deeply connected to each other. That said, I think that what we focus on in our work at Purpose is not the technology, but the way that this connectivity is changing people, their behavior, their expectations around participation, their relationship to institutions, their sense of agency. I think what's really interesting is those things have changed in a world that is so connected. If social media disappeared, people would find other ways to do that, and you see manifestations of New Power that go far beyond the social media platforms.

So our values have already shifted to the point that we would find another way to continue cultivating New Power?
Yeah. I think that people will not go back to a posture in which they have just a compliant-based relationship with society and institutions. They want to do more. They want to participate.

Jeremy Heimans is the co-founder and CEO of Purpose, a global organization headquartered in New York that builds and supports movements for a more open, just, and habitable world. Purpose has advised organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Google, and UNICEF. He is co-founder of GetUp!, an Australian political organization with more members than all of Australia's political parties combined, and Avaaz, the world's largest online citizens' movement, now with nearly 50 million members worldwide.

Aidan Young is assistant manager of digital engagement at the Rubin Museum of Art.

WAR MAGIC: THE WIZARDING WORLD OF TIBETAN SORCERY



Canopy of a Mahakala Yantra; Tibet; 18th–19th century; pigments on cloth; 24 ⅜ x 20 ⅛); Rubin Museum of Art; gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin; C2006.66.509 (HAR 977)

Tantric ritual technologies involving mantras, charms, paintings, and sculptures enabled rulers to conquer their enemies and harness power.

BY *Karl Debreczeny*

"Non-humans who conceal [themselves] by magical emanation, of such high and low [places] as Jang (Lijiang) of the [Mongol] empire which comprises everything under the sun, listen [to my command]!

It is absolutely forbidden to harm those who hold my [decree] by such means as the harmful eight classes of gods and demons, curses, invocation rituals to destroy enemies, malevolent spirits, poltergeists, and oath-breakers. [All] must heed this decree by Ga Anyen Dampa!

However, if there are those who disobey, [I vow by] the Three Jewels that, having unleashed the fierce punishment of the Dharma Protectors, their heads will split into one hundred pieces!"

SO READS A DECREE by Dampa, a thirteenth-century ritual specialist of the wrathful deity Mahakala at Qubilai Khan's court. The decree, which doubles as a protective charm for those who carry it, demonstrates Dampa's willingness to mix political authority with tantric power, the human realm with the spirit world.

The force of religion to claim political power is the focus of the exhibition and publication *Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism*. Tibetan Buddhism offered Inner Asian empires a symbolic path to legitimation as well as a literal means to achieving physical power: a ritual technology that we would characterize today as magic.

The image of a monk meditating in a remote cave is a Western romantic stereotype that limits our understanding of the wide range of Tibetan religious activity. In reality, many religious figures have played much more active, engaged roles in history, acting as court chaplains who served their ruler-patron's needs. Monk-rulers also rose to power, conflating the interests of religion and the state. For the imperial courts of Asia, one of the great appeals of Esoteric Buddhism was its claim of efficacy in dealing with worldly goals and the military application of its rituals that reflected a zeitgeist of subjugation, coercion, and control—in a word, power.[1] Rulers and imperial courts were less interested in meditation or enlightenment and more concerned with what religion could do for the state: protecting the nation; extending the life, wealth, and power of its rulers; curing epidemics; controlling the weather; and pacifying or killing its enemies.

Tibetans embraced the tantric developments of Buddhism in India, such as the recasting of the Buddha as a nexus of spiritual and political authority, which eroded the distinction between secular and sacred power. With this merging of sacred and worldly imagery came the elevation of wrathful deities to the status of buddhas. These deities and their practices were not just useful in terms of overcoming obstacles to liberation but also in accomplishing more mundane worldly ends. The second chapter of the *Hevajra Tantra*, for instance, includes detailed descriptions of rituals to destroy an enemy army and even their gods.

As scholar Bryan Cuevas explains in his chapter on magical warfare in the *Faith and Empire* catalog, tantric ritual was seen as a potent technology to control both the internal and external worlds, with four main goals: pacification, enrichment, subjugation, and destruction.[2] Tibetans viewed the legendary eighth-century wizard Padmasambhava—who is said to have engaged in magical battles with local gods and demons to tame the region—as a source of the most potent forms of such magical power. A wide array of images, such as human effigies like this painted version on the left or more abstract ritual dough-offering sculptures (*torma*), were employed to both ward off danger and subdue or destroy one's enemies.

Magical warfare, and the charisma of those who mastered it, became an important part of political legitimacy in the Tibetan Buddhist world. Lama Zhang is a fascinating study in the political and martial employment of Tantric Buddhism in the twelfth century. He engaged in political and military affairs, ruled territory, and enforced secular law. He even sent his own students into battle as part of their religious practice. In addition to conventional weapons, Lama Zhang employed a ritualized warfare of magic spells, purportedly aided by powerful protector deities such as Shri Devi and Mahakala.

Tibetan Buddhists, known for the efficacy of their ritual magic, also served imperial courts to the east, such as the Tangut kingdom of Xixia (1038–1227). One cleric associated with the Tangut imperial line, Tsami Lotsawa, is linked to at least sixteen texts on the wrathful deity Mahakala, including *The Instructions of Shri Mahakala: The Usurpation of Government*, a short "how-to" work on overthrowing a state and taking power. When Chinggis Khan first laid siege to the Tangut capital in 1210, the Tangut's Tibetan court chaplain summoned Mahakala to the battlefield, at which point the dams the Mongols were using to flood the city burst, drowning Mongol troops and forcing Chinggis to withdraw. Tibetan accounts clearly state that when the imperial preceptor made a *torma* he had a vision of Mahakala on the battlefield, and the Mongols were forced to retreat. This account of their unusual military setback through effective religious ritual no doubt caught Mongol attention.

The Mongols adopted the Tangut practice of employing Tibetans as their preceptors, and the wrathful deity Mahakala became the state protector and focus of the imperial cult. Mahakala ("The Great Black One"), represented in the sculpture below,

Panjaranatha Mahakala; Tibet; 14th century; steatite with color and gilding; 7 x 4 1/2 x 1 1/2 in. (17.8 x 11.4 x 3.8 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art; gift of Florence and Herbert Irving, 2015; 2015.500.4.18.

Vajrabhairava with Consort; Mongolia; 18th-19th century; gilt copper alloy; 14 1/8 x 12 5/8 x 5 3/4 in. (35.9 x 32.1 x 14.6 cm); Rubin Museum of Art; C2005.25.1 (HAR 68853)

was credited with intervening in several key battles. For instance, early in the Mongolian campaign to push south in China, Qubilai Khan's ritual specialist at court, the aforementioned Dampa, summoned Mahakala, who was seen going house to house on the battlefield. When the Chinese petitioned their god of war Zhenwu to deliver them, the Chinese god left a note on his altar saying that he had to yield to the Black God leading the Mongol army.

In the most famous example, Qubilai Khan asked his Tibetan preceptor for Mahakala to intervene against the Southern Song, which his greatest general could not conquer. A temple was erected with its image facing south, and shortly thereafter, the Song capital surrendered. When the former Song emperor and his courtiers were brought north, they were astonished to see the image of Mahakala just as they had seen him among Mongol troops. This sculpture used in the conquest of China became a potent symbol of both Qubilai Khan's rule and the Yuan imperial lineage.

Not all Tibetans welcomed Mongolian involvement in Tibetan affairs, and repeated incursions into Tibetan lands resulted in a cottage industry of ritual war-magic specialists known as Mongol-repellers (Sokdokpa). For instance, the seventeenth-century Rikdzin Chodrak, the last figure in the lineage of this painting at right, was famous as an artist and for his magical repulsion rituals against Mongol armies. The deity Yamari, in the form of "Blazing Razor of Extreme Repelling," is depicted in the center as a three-bladed ritual dagger used for pinning down malevolent forces and slaying demons, a form closely associated with the archetypal wizard, Padmasambhava.

By the seventeenth century, magic was an integral part of warfare and political legitimacy. Both sides used it in a protracted civil war in Central Tibet that brought the Dalai Lamas to power. The Fifth Dalai Lama's arsenal of destructive rites included the fearsome deities Vajrabhairava (represented in the sculpture above), Yama Dharmaraja, and Shri Devi as Makzor Gyelmo ("Queen Who Repels Armies"). He recognized that the political charisma accrued to those who mastered such magical abilities was crucial to his regime's survival.[3]

The Mongolian helmet at right is a striking example of the deployment of magic on the battlefield. The interlocking letters of the Kalachakra mantra, known as "The Ten Syllables of Power," are the central iconographic feature over the brow. Above looms the wrathful deity Vajrabhairava, one of the principle deities in the Gelukpa Order's arsenal of destructive magical practices.

The emperors of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) adopted Tibetan Buddhism as a means of political legitimacy and used war magic as one means to establish their authority. In the eighteenth century, the Qianlong Emperor, who positioned himself as an emanation of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom

Yamari as "Blazing Razor of Extreme Repelling"; Tibet; ca. late 17th century; pigment on cloth; 22 ¼ x 14 ⅝ in. (56.5 x 37.1 cm); Rubin Museum of Art; C2008.4 (HAR 65815)

Helmet (*rmog*) with Wrathful Deities and Mantras of Power; Mongolia; 15th–17th century; iron, gold, silver, copper; height: 7 5/8 in. (19.5 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art; purchase, gift of William H. Riggs, by exchange, 1999; 1999.120

Manjushri, had a strong affinity with Manjushri's wrathful emanation Vajrabhairava. Qianlong's state chaplain Changkya Rolpai Dorje also intervened in battles on behalf of the Qing state. Rituals performed in the capital are said to have resulted in flames falling on the battlefield in Gyelrong (Jinchuan), one of the most costly, protracted wars of the Qing.

This aspect of the Tibetan tradition might come as a surprise—and even run counter to popular perceptions of Buddhism—but the employment of ritual magic was integral to the power of Tibetan Buddhism in politics. In a tradition where religion and politics were inseparably intertwined, it was only natural that rulers sought religious answers to tackle real-world problems, be it extending their lifespan or overcoming adversaries.

1. Geoffrey Goble, "The Politics of Esoteric Buddhism: Amoghavajra and the Tang State," in *Esoteric Buddhism in Mediaeval Maritime Asia: Networks of Masters, Texts, Icons*, ed. Andrea Acri (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2016), 123–39.

2. Bryan J. Cuevas, "The Politics of Magical Warfare," in *Faith and Empire: Art, Politics and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Karl Debreczeny (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2019), 170–89.

3. George S. FitzHerbert, "Rituals as War Propaganda in the Establishment of the Ganden Phodrang State," in "The Ganden Phodrang Army and Buddhism," ed. Alice Travers and Federica Venturi, special issue, *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* (forthcoming).

See these artworks and learn more in the exhibition *Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism* at the Rubin Museum.

Karl Debreczeny is senior curator of collections and research at the Rubin Museum of Art. His research focuses on artistic, religious, and political exchanges between the Tibetan and Chinese traditions. His publications include *The Black Hat Eccentric: Artistic Visions of the Tenth Karmapa* (2012) and the coedited *The Tenth Karmapa and Tibet's Turbulent Seventeenth Century* (2016).

DEEPER DIVE

Keeping the Faith: Religion and Politics Today

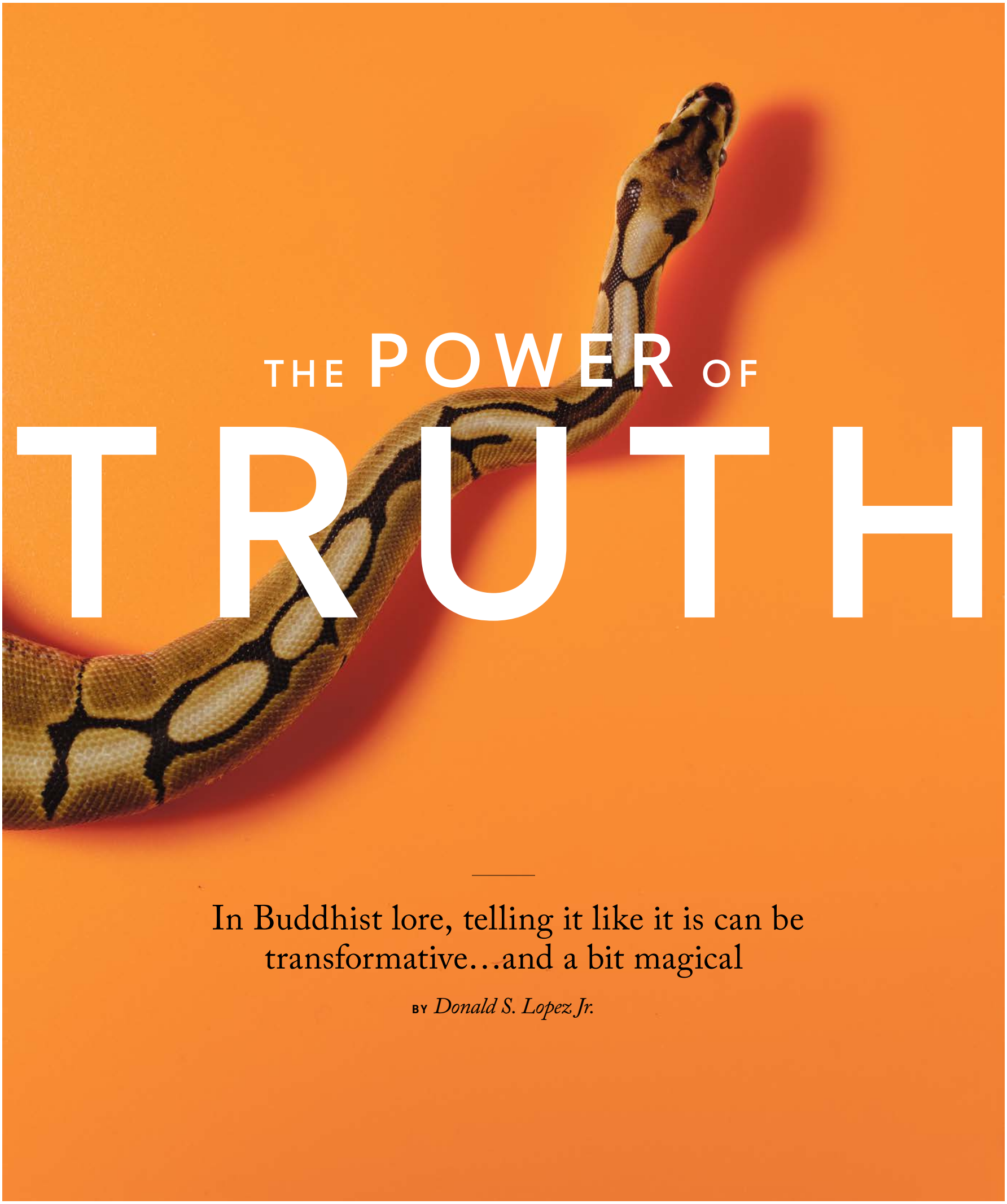
by William Dewey

The art in the exhibition *Faith and Empire* depicts empires and emperors that have long since fallen, but it also draws connections between religion and politics that are still relevant today. In an increasingly secular world, we might think that religion is less of a political force than it was in the past. Yet faith remains not only a practice of personal devotion but also a source of national identity and tool of political power. Empires also are not a relic of the past; the United States extends its military power and cultural influence throughout the world, while other nations seek to expand their own realms of control.

Religious symbols are one key to the power of historic and modern empires. Tangut, Yuan, and Qing rulers worshipped the protector deity Mahakala to attain success in battle, and he became patron of the realm. These rulers also sponsored depictions of themselves as compassionate bodhisattvas—Qing emperors as Manjushri, and the Dalai Lamas as Avalokiteshvara—spreading the dharma to their realms. Rulers today do not portray themselves as gods (not overtly, at least), but religious imagery retains its power as a national symbol, even beyond openly religious states like the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although the American Constitution forbids the establishment of an official religion, the motto "In God We Trust" appears on money, and elected officials swear oaths of office on Bibles. Even in secular Britain where church attendance is shrinking, the queen heads the Church of England and religious trappings abound in the monarchy's symbolism.

Throughout history, rulers have reclaimed past imperial glories by reclaiming past faiths. The Mongol Yuan dynasty created a model for patronizing Tibetan Buddhism and its lamas, which succeeding dynasties imitated to legitimize their conquests. Today the atheist Communist Party rules China, not an emperor with faith in Tibetan Buddhism. Yet like the past Qing emperors, the Chinese government claims authority over Tibet's reincarnating lamas, and President Xi Jinping has suggested that nomads consider him a living bodhisattva. Outside of Asia, President Vladimir Putin has allied with the Russian Orthodox Church to claim the former glories of the Tsars. Leaders of the United States often invoke its own religio-historical mythology, such as the City on a Hill, a biblical metaphor of the ideal community originally affirmed by Puritan settlers, and Manifest Destiny, a belief in the divine sanction to conquer in the name of democracy.

William Dewey is a curatorial fellow at the Rubin Museum. He recently completed a PhD in Tibetan Buddhism from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and spent a year teaching at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Kathmandu.



THE POWER OF TRUTH

In Buddhist lore, telling it like it is can be transformative…and a bit magical

BY *Donald S. Lopez Jr.*

A simple statement of the truth, rather than a prayer or a magic spell, can have transformative power.

IN SANSKRIT, *SATYA* IS THE WORD typically translated as "truth." It is derived from the verb "to be." The word *sat* means "being, existing." Adding the suffix *-ya* yields *satya*, which might be translated as "the state of being," the "state of existing." It is not a long leap to translate it as "reality" or "truth." It is this *satya* that appears in such famous Buddhist terms as the four noble truths, the two truths, ultimate truth, and conventional truth. Each of these terms is the subject of extensive commentary and exegesis by the various philosophical schools of Buddhism. But a less famous term provides insights into not just truth but also its inherent power.

Satyavacana combines the word for "truth" with *vacana*, meaning "speech" or "statement." The root *vac* is a cognate of the Latin *vox* and the English *voice*. When we speak of "the word of the Buddha," *vacana* is translated as "word." Thus we might translate *satyavacana* as "words of truth" or "truth statement." In one sense, it simply means a statement of fact. In Buddhism, however, the statement of the truth has a particular power—indeed a magical power.

Many stories illustrate this power. On the night that Prince Siddhartha left his palace in search of a state beyond birth and death, he had to dispense with his royal raiment and long locks. Drawing his sword, he cut off his hair with a single stroke and threw it into the air, saying, "If I am to become a buddha, let it remain in the sky." The prince threw his locks high enough that they reached the summit of Mount Meru, where the god Indra caught them and placed them in a shrine. The future Buddha's words are an example of a statement of truth.

Such statements abound in Buddhist literature. They not only predict the future—as in this story—but also restore what has been lost, including body parts. There is an entire genre of Buddhist literature about *dehadana*, "gift of the body." These stories regularly appear in the *Jataka* collection, a recounting of the Buddha's previous lives.

One such *dehadana* story involves King Śibi. The god Indra hears of the king's great generosity and decides to test him. Disguising himself as a blind priest, he asks the king for one of his eyes. The king immediately gives him both. Impressed by the king's willingness to give away something as precious as his eyesight, Indra reveals his divine form and praises the king. Learning that the blind priest is not really blind, the king asks to have his sight restored. Indra apologizes, saying it is beyond his powers; only a statement of truth can restore King Śibi's sight. In W. H. D. Rouse's 1901 translation, the king declares:

> Whatever sort, whatever kind of suitor
> shall draw near,
> Whoever comes to ask of me, he to my
> heart is dear:
> If these my solemn words be true, now
> let my eye appear!

The king's eye grew back in its socket. Another statement of truth was required for the other eye. This narrative illustrates how in Buddhism a simple statement of the truth, rather than a prayer or a magic spell, can have transformative power, a power greater than that of even Indra, the king of the gods.

Let me close with another story. One day a poisonous snake bit a young boy. Buddhist monks often possessed medical knowledge, so the distraught parents stopped a passing monk and asked him to save their child's life. Examining the bite, the monk said that there was no antidote; the only possible cure was an act of truth. Time was short, as the poison was spreading up the boy's leg toward his heart. The monk asked the father to speak. He said, "If I have never seen a monk that I did not think was a scoundrel, may the boy live." The poison retreated to the boy's waist. Next the mother said, "If I have never loved my husband, may the boy live." The poison retreated to the boy's leg. The monk said, "If I have never believed a word of the dharma, finding it to be utter nonsense, may the boy live." The boy rose, completely cured. Here the truth has the power to cure a snakebite. It also has the power to make us smile.

Donald S. Lopez Jr. is the Arthur E. Link Distinguished University Professor of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies at the University of Michigan. His recent books include *Hyecho's Journey: The World of Buddhism*, *Gendun Chopel: Tibet's Modern Visionary*, and *The Passion Book: A Tibetan Guide to Love and Sex*, with Thupten Jinpa. His article "The Three Times" appeared in the last issue of *Spiral*.

POEM

Measures for Managing Rebirth

by Kenji C. Liu

To realise
unbroken feudal
sustainability

and uniform ideological
rebirth

To enthusiastically serve
the gross
dharmic product

Our system recognises
an official
order of lama
capitalism
wealth
reincarnation
and
buddha
power suits

A comforting
structure of recognized
prayers

A dynasty
reborn
to administer the struggle
body
with
strong avatar policy—

O beautiful government
monks
isn't this compassion?

Kenji C. Liu is author of *Monsters I Have Been* (Alice James Books, 2019) and *Map of an Onion*, the national winner of the 2015 Hillary Gravendyk Poetry Prize. A Kundiman fellow and an alumnus of VONA/Voices, the Djerassi Resident Artist Program, and the Community of Writers, he lives in Los Angeles. @kenjicliu.

CREATURE COMFORTS

Awaken your power animal and discover a new kind of spiritual strength

BY *Shamaness ChokBar*

WHAT DO A Red Chinese Dragon, Hummingbird, Eagle-Owl, Bear, Toad, Butterfly, White Raven, Raccoon, Roe Deer, Flying Horse Pegasus, Hare, Snake, Wolf, and Heron have in common? They are all my Power Animals. These beings are best described as energy patterns in the shape of a specific animal. A Power Animal has certain abilities and qualities, its own mind-consciousness, that is separate from you, and it belongs to you. Strictly speaking, it is you—just on a deeper, subconscious level.

Everyone is born with at least one Power Animal. You may have more depending on what you current reincarnation calls for and what qualities need to be developed and exercised. People who work directly with others, especially in one-on-one healing professions, usually have multiple Power Animals. Our universe has a specific structure in which everyone has clear tasks. Power Animals are part of the default spiritual support system for human beings.

Power Animals know everything about your past, current, and future reincarnations. They will travel with you into the next reincarnation. They have no physical bodies and thus no fear. Their only agenda is to help you become more fully you and to get you where you need to be when you need to be there.

Since Power Animals have a separate mind-consciousness, if you are able to connect with them—consciously, visually, or even verbally—it feels like connecting to a real, wise, all-knowing friend who accepts you, loves you, and knows what you need to do and when you need to do it in order to become your fullest self. It's possible to find your Power Animal through shamanic meditation with a drum and rattling, shamanic dancing meditation, Power Animal dancing meditation, or classic motionless meditation, as well as in a dream state or through lucid dreaming.

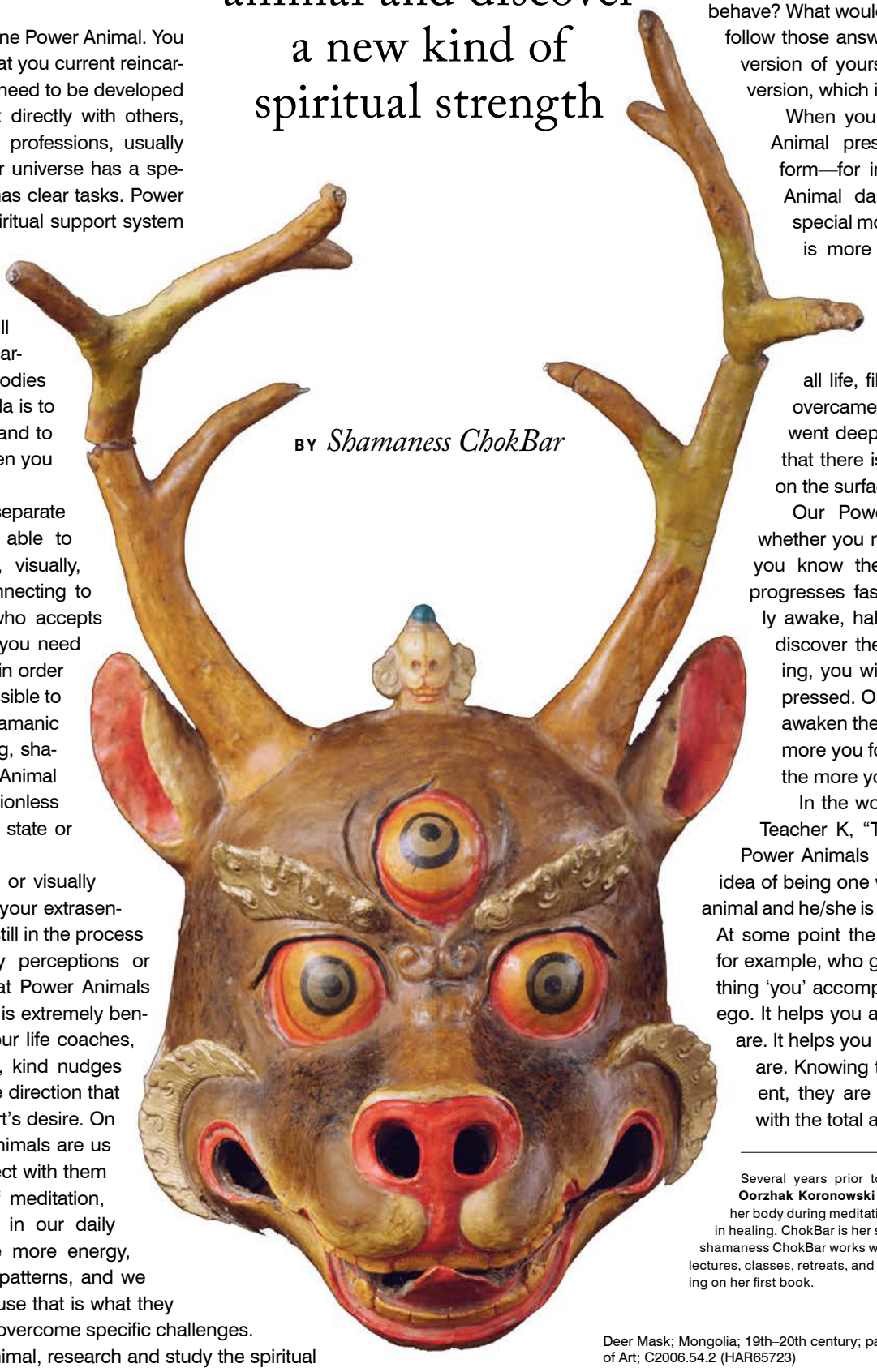
The ability to connect verbally or visually with a Power Animal depends on your extrasensory perceptions. Even if you are still in the process of developing your extrasensory perceptions or meditative skills, just knowing that Power Animals exist and understanding their role is extremely beneficial. I like to think of them as our life coaches, cheerleaders who give us subtle, kind nudges and are happy when we follow the direction that truly represents our authentic heart's desire. On a deeper level, because Power Animals are us and we are them, when we connect with them consciously through any type of meditation, they become more pronounced in our daily lives. We will automatically have more energy, since Power Animals are energy patterns, and we will become more powerful, because that is what they give us—power. It is the power to overcome specific challenges.

Once you know your Power Animal, research and study the spiritual qualities of that animal and start consciously exercising those qualities every day when faced with challenging situations. This is not easy, to say the least, but it is what ultimately develops your spiritual strength and power in an almost playful way, and it happens much faster than without awareness of your Power Animal. When you are faced with a difficult situation, playfully ask yourself, What would a Red Chinese Dragon do in this situation? How would she behave? What would she say? Then do your best to follow those answers, not as the fearful, resistant version of yourself, but as the deeper Dragon version, which is noble, clear, and fearless.

When you are able to grasp your Power Animal presence in any way, shape, or form—for instance by engaging in Power Animal dancing meditation—it is a very special moment, as it shows you that there is more to yourself and different parts of yourself than you once thought. Connecting with your Power Animal reveals the interconnectedness of all life, filling you with joy and awe. You overcame our limited human perceptions, went deep inside yourself, and now know that there is more to life than what we see on the surface.

Our Power Animals are always there, whether you recognize them or not, but once you know them your spiritual development progresses faster. Power Animals can be fully awake, half-awake, or sleeping when you discover them. If a Power Animal is sleeping, you will be lethargic and possibly depressed. One of the roles of a shaman is to awaken these sleeping Power Animals. The more you follow the path of your truest self, the more your Power Animal will awaken.

In the words of my nonphysical Spiritual Teacher K, "The concept and knowledge of Power Animals helps greatly to understand the idea of being one with another, where you are that animal and he/she is you. Not sometimes, but always. At some point the question of a credit comes in, for example, who gets the credit for some amazing thing 'you' accomplished? It does wonders for the ego. It helps you accept another just the way they are. It helps you accept yourself just the way you are. Knowing that even though they are different, they are still you—a part of you—helps with the total acceptance of self and others."



Deer Mask; Mongolia; 19th–20th century; papier-mâché, polychrome; Rubin Museum of Art; C2006.54.2 (HAR65723)

Several years prior to becoming an awakened shaman **Larisa Oorzhak Koronowski** had a mystical experience of light entering her body during meditation, after which she was able to assist people in healing. ChokBar is her spiritual name. Native Tuvan hereditary white shamaness ChokBar works with people individually and leads workshops, lectures, classes, retreats, and shamanic expeditions. She is currently working on her first book.

Within and Between Us: A Year of Power at the Rubin

Power begins within and between us. How can we tap into this potential? At the Rubin in 2019, we're bringing together a full year of exhibitions, talks, programs, and experiences that spark new ways of thinking about power, from intention to action. Drawing on a diverse range of sources and perspectives, including Tibetan prayer wheels, neuroscience, historical documents, community organizers, contemporary artists, and spiritual leaders, we will explore systems of power and our own personal and collective agency. Join us at the Rubin Museum as we forge new pathways to empowerment and positive change in the power structures that build our world.

About the Museum

The Rubin Museum of Art

WHERE CONTEMPORARY MINDS MEET THE ART AND WISDOM OF THE HIMALAYAS

The Rubin Museum of Art is a space for mindful cultural exchange, where you'll experience how art and ideas from the Himalayas intersect with our contemporary lives. Boundaries dissolve as we traverse art forms, time, cultures, and geography to incite your curiosity and spark new ways of seeing the world. Thought-provoking exhibitions, immersive events, talks, films, concerts, and community gatherings make the Rubin a destination for discovery. Explore infinite inner and outer worlds and the ways we are all connected at our vibrant space in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood.

MUSEUM HOURS

Monday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM
Tuesday CLOSED
Wednesday 11:00 AM–9:00 PM
Thursday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM
Friday 11:00 AM–10:00 PM
Saturday 11:00 AM–6:00 PM
Sunday 11:00 AM–6:00 PM

VISIT

The Rubin Museum of Art | 150 West 17th Street | New York, NY

CONNECT WITH US

Explore the collection, peek behind the scenes on our blog, and receive the latest updates on our exhibitions and current program listings!

- Visit us online at RubinMuseum.org
- Join our email list at RubinMuseum.org/news
- Follow us on social media @RubinMuseum

#OURPOWER

- Download the free Rubin app and access many works from our collection in the palm of your hand.

Exhibitions

Through the lens of Himalayan art, we journey with all who are curious to explore our shared human experience and consciously and insightfully navigate the complexities of our world today.

Scenocosme: Gregory Lasserre (b. 1976, Annecy, France) & Anaïs met den Ancxt (b. 1981, Lyon, France); detail of *Metamorphy*; 2014; interactive installation; courtesy of the artists

Gateway to Himalayan Art
Start here for an introduction to the rich artistic traditions of the region, illuminating the primary figures, symbols, materials, and techniques presented throughout the Museum.

Masterworks of Himalayan Art
Journey across geography and more than a thousand years of history, tracing artistically and historically significant works from the Rubin's collection, as well as new acquisitions and gifts.

The Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room
Step into the Shrine Room for a moment of contemplation, beauty, or wonder. An ongoing focal point of the Rubin Museum and a visitor favorite, this immersive installation features art from the collection and is inspired by traditional shrines.

Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism
February 1, 2019–July 15, 2019
Experience how Tibetan Buddhism once offered divine means to claim political power. More than sixty exquisite objects from the eighth to the nineteenth century place Himalayan art in a larger global context, at the historical intersection of politics and religion.

The Power of Intention: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel
March 1, 2019–October 14, 2019
Get inspired by key ideas related to prayer wheels—ritual objects containing thousands of written mantras—and experience how we can empower ourselves to create positive change in and around us. Traditional and contemporary art come together to illuminate the relationship between our intentions, commitments, and actions.

Clapping with Stones: Art and Acts of Resistance
August 16, 2019–January 6, 2020
Concepts from punk to pacifism converge in an exhibition that reflects on the subjects of transgression and subversion. Presented through the lens of diverse local and global artists, this timely exhibition invites us to look beyond the surface and consider art's transformative power on society and culture.

Shahidul Alam: Truth to Power
November 8, 2019–May 4, 2020
See a nuanced representation of contemporary South Asia in this solo exhibition highlighting one of the most influential photographers living in the region today. More than thirty of Shahidul Alam's photographs, many never shown in the United States, illuminate his ongoing commitment to empowered self-representation and political activism in Bangladesh.

Public tours are offered daily and are free with admission.

Programs & Experiences

As a space for mindful, cultural exchange, the Rubin is driven by the desire to challenge, surprise, and provoke—we want to bring you into the fold to expand the limits of what an art museum can be.

The Rubin presents onstage conversations, workshops, concerts, film screenings, and other innovative public events to expand on the themes in the galleries. For current listings, visit RubinMuseum.org.

PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCES

The Wheel of Intentions
Empower your own intentions with this interactive installation in the lobby created by data artist Ben Rubin, Potion Design, and the Rubin Museum. Your intentions will join those of other visitors as they travel up the spiral staircase.

Sharing Power at the Long Table
Community groups are invited to initiate conversations on sharing power as part of Lois Weaver's participatory art project *The Long Table*. Have a seat, read the menu, and take part in a unique conversation structured by etiquette.

All programs subject to change.

MUSIC & PERFORMANCE

Naked Soul
Hear performances from some of the country's top singer/songwriters without microphones or amplifiers, as if the music were, acoustically speaking, naked. The musicians in the series draw on the universal themes inherent in Himalayan art—spirituality, peace, tolerance, wisdom, compassion—on select Friday evenings.

Rhythms of India
Performers explore the varied traditions of Indian music, from timeless ragas to contemporary fusion.

HIMALAYAN HERITAGE

Intrigued by the culture, art, history, and sacred traditions of the Himalayan region? Join the Rubin Museum's Himalayan Heritage, an informal group that meets on the first Wednesday of the month. Events are hosted by Tashi Chodron, a Museum educator and expert on the region who works at the Rubin and other organizations for the preservation of Tibetan culture.

TALKS

Brainwave
Our longest running series is all about understanding the mind and what makes us who we are. This talk series brings together neuroscientists and notable personalities for engaging conversations, along with related films and workshops.

Compassionate Action
Find the tools to commit to intentions and enact change in your life. In these workshops, experts and facilitators will walk you through the course, helping you realize your goals, stay committed, and find community along the way.

The Power of Non-Conformity
Counter-cultural practices upend normative systems and ways of thinking, sometimes leading to a form of liberation. Artists are invited to engage in onstage conversations, subversive suppers, and radical takeovers of the Museum, all designed to upend our accustomed behaviors.

BREATHE: CONNECT MIND & BODY

Explore the connections between the wisdom traditions expressed in Himalayan art and contemporary mind/body practices in a variety of programs and workshops.

Mindfulness Meditation
WEDNESDAYS, 1:00 PM
Beginners, dabblers, and skilled meditators can join expert teachers weekly to practice the art of attention. Each session is inspired by a different work of art from the Rubin Museum's collection. A free podcast of each program is also available online.

FAMILY PROGRAMS

Family Sundays
The Rubin welcomes visitors of all ages! Families can drop into the Museum on Sundays between 1:00 to 4:00 PM for casual art making and free family-friendly activities. Designed for children ages three and up with accompanying adults, the art activities change monthly and connect with the art and ideas of the Himalayas.

Photograph by Asya Danilova

More Than a Museum

We mix arts and culture with a social experience. In addition to six galleries, join friends in the café and shop, or make the Rubin the lively venue for your next private event.

CAFÉ SERAI

Enjoy the aromas and flavors of the Himalayas at Café Serai, an inviting spot for your next meal. The café is open to anyone during Museum hours and does not require an admission ticket.

EVENING HOURS

Wednesday Evenings
Museum Open Late 6:00–9:00 PM
Café Serai offers a Himalayan Happy Hour with special discounts on drinks, shared plates, and more.

K2 Friday Nights
Free Museum Admission
6:00–10:00 PM
During K2 Friday Nights, Café Serai becomes the K2 Lounge, offering a special pan-Asian menu to accompany the evening's DJ and programs. Happy hour runs from 6:00 to 7:00 PM with a two-for-one special on beer, wine, and well drinks.

THE SHOP

Take a memory of the Museum home with you, or give a gift from the Rubin! The shop's selection of jewelry, artisan items, books, and other treasures feature an array of unique items, many unavailable anywhere else. All proceeds from the shop support the Rubin Museum of Art, and items can be purchased in store or online at RubinMuseum.org. Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases.

SPACE RENTALS AND CORPORATE RETREATS

If you're planning an event or need to make a professional conference more inspiring, consider the Rubin. It's a memorable place for guests, and we make it easy to plan—with a range of wellness experiences, educational tours, and catering menus available.

You Make It Possible

Like all nonprofit arts organizations, the Rubin Museum is only as strong as its supporters. You help us create a space for contemplation, learning, inspiration, community, and art. Join us! Visit RubinMuseum.org/support to learn more.

Become a member or give the gift of membership
Members get more! Benefits include invitations to exclusive previews and tours, free admission to Mindfulness Meditation, program discounts, unlimited entry to the galleries, and much more. Membership to the Rubin Museum of Art is also a special gift that friends and family of all ages can enjoy throughout the year.

Make a donation
Your support helps make art and timeless wisdom come alive for thousands of people each year, bringing inspiration and meaning into our visitors' lives.

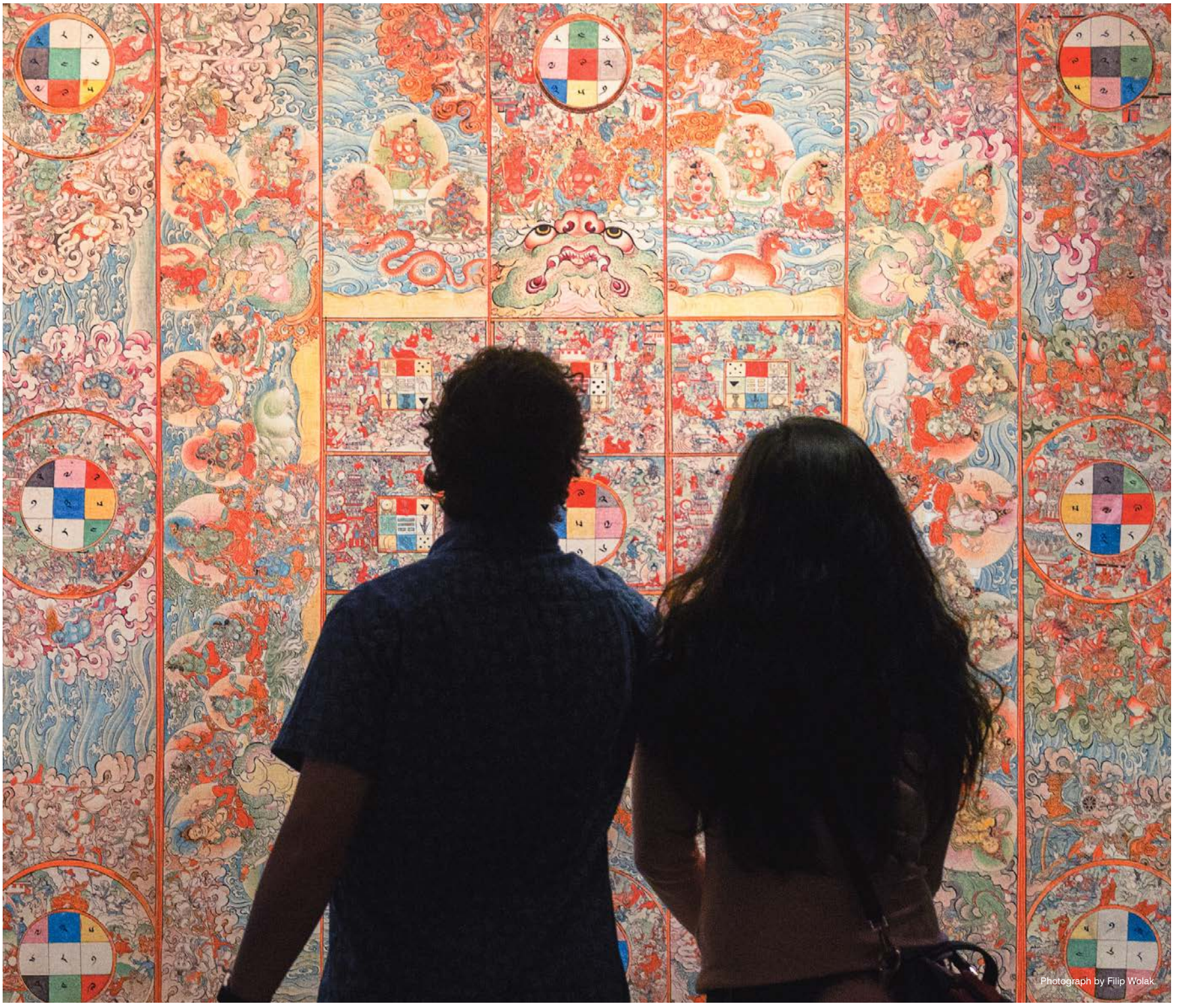
Volunteer or become a docent
See the inner workings of the Museum and contribute your valuable time and service. Docents connect new visitors with our art and programs as they present thematic tours, gallery talks, and other educational initiatives. Apply to be a volunteer or docent online.

Thank you to our distribution partners!

Organizations in New York City and beyond help make *Spiral* possible. Find the full list of our partners, as well as exclusive content and distribution locations, at RubinMuseum.org/Spiral.

Photograph by Alex Bershaw

Visit RubinMuseum.org/Spiral for exclusive online-only content, including:
How solar power arrives in suitcases in Nepal from Howard Kaplan • Empowering men and women from the inside out from Kasia Urbaniak • The power of monuments in New York City from Anna Cahn • More advice and tips for diffusing power struggles from Ayman Mukerji Househam • The extended story of Kembra Pfahler's power object • Expanded interviews from Lama Tsultrim Allione, artists Monika Bravo and Youdhi Maharjan, Sukhvinder Obhi, and Jeremy Heimans


Photograph by Filip Wolak

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NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Council on the Arts

THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 WEST 17TH STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10011
RUBINMUSEUM.ORG

FOLLOW US ON

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POWER
within and between us

#OURPOWER

A YEARLONG EXPLORATION AND A MAGAZINE TO GUIDE YOU

Power begins within and between us. How can we tap into this potential? At the Rubin in 2019, we're bringing together a full year of exhibitions, talks, programs, and experiences that spark new ways of thinking about power, from intention to action. Join us as we forge new pathways to empowerment and positive change in the power structures that build our world.

RubinMuseum.org

Visit **RubinMuseum.org/news** to stay up to date with exhibitions, programming, and more.